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Mentoring Canadian Theatre:
Paul Thompson's Influence On
The State of Canadian Theatre
Through His Work in Collective Creation
During the 1970s and Early 1980s

BY

Ryan Farrell ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

Edmonton, Alberta
Spring, 2000

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DEGREE: Master of Arts

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 2000

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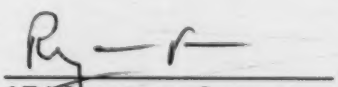

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April 5, 2000

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Mentoring Canadian Theatre: Paul Thompson's Influence On The State of Canadian Theatre Through His Work in Collective Creation During the 1970s and Early 1980s* submitted by Ryan Farrell in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. Rosalind Kerr

Dr. John A. Hawkins

Dr. J. Joseph Norris

Professor Kim McCaw

April 3, 2000

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I demonstrate how Paul Thompson's collective creations from the 1970s and early 1980s provided a mechanism by which to attach theatre practice to the creation of dramatic text. I demonstrate how Paul Thompson developed his collective creations to help replenish the body of Canadian written work in the country's theatre industry, creating a volume of playable Canadian theatre texts that were developed by Canadians, for Canadians, and based on Canadian subject-matter. I then demonstrate how working with Paul Thompson influenced three particular individuals during that period, each of whom has continued to develop new Canadian plays.

The thesis is divided into six different sections. First, I give as an introduction a history of Canadian theatre from the First World War to Canada's Centennial Celebration in 1967. I follow this with a history of collective creations in Canada. Then, I discuss the career of Paul Thompson and his work at Theatre Passe Muraille. Next, I outline the career of Layne Coleman, focusing on how the collective creations on which he worked provided him with the skills necessary to work in new play development as an actor, director, and writer. I then discuss Jo Ann McIntyre's career, focusing on the collective creations in which she participated and how they ultimately led her to her current position as a director/dramaturg. Finally, I explore John Palmer's career, and how they led him to his current position of company dramaturg.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my colleagues in the Drama Department for their unending encouragement: Frances Bitney, Kyna Hamill, Oliver Kamau, Wesley Eccleston, Xuan An, Kristy Nutting, and Chris Eaket. Many thanks go to Kim McCaw, as well, who has provided me with an exceptional amount of support throughout my thesis. I would also like to extend a sincere thank you to Alex Hawkins for assisting me with enormous dedication. As well, many thanks go to Rosalind Kerr for staying on as my co-supervisor and seeing the work through to its conclusion.

I would also like to thank the Mary Louise Imrie Travel Grant, which provided financial assistance in the research of my thesis.

I am, of course, exceedingly grateful to Paul Thompson, Layne Coleman, Jo Ann McIntyre and John Palmer for their insightful reflections on their respective careers.

I would also like to extend a thank you to my family whose love and support have guided me further than I ever expected.

And thank you to Jen, who has been there through it all.

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NOTE ON FORMAT:

Unless otherwise indicated, all direct quotes are taken from the personal interviews I have conducted with the subjects in this thesis on the following dates:

Layne Coleman – May 7, 1999

Jo Ann McIntyre – August 10, 1998

John Palmer – July 7, 1998

Paul Thompson – June 17, 1998

Introduction I – The Historical Context For Collective Creation

Theatrical activity in Canada has a long and fascinating history. Canadian plays go back as far as 1606 when Marc Lescarbot wrote *Le Theatre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France* and staged it in Indian war canoes to honour the arrival of French dignitaries at Port Royal. Playwriting in Canada in English dates back to the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century Canadian playhouses began to appear in substantial numbers, though mainly to accommodate American and British touring companies. The first half of the twentieth century saw the development of a thriving amateur theatre movement and the best radio drama on the continent, as well as the emergence of a handful of playwrights of distinction.

Despite its roots seeded early in the country's history, despite the existence of a number of Canadian plays prior to 1967, and despite the existence of a theatre producing tradition, the Canadian theatre had never been dedicated to the aim of developing a Canadian drama as part of its production efforts. This is to say that there had never been a meaningful alliance between theatre production and dramatic writing in Canada. Therefore, the work of theatres did not necessarily include a dedication to the creation of a Canadian drama. As late as 1945 there were no Canadian professional theatre

companies. In 1959, theatre critic Nathan Cohen wrote in the *Tamarack Review*, "there is not in Canada a single person who earns a living as a playwright, or who has any practical hope of doing so"(28). Even later, in 1965, Thomas B. Hendry in his article "Trends in Canadian Theatre" in *Tulane Drama Review* failed to mention the role of any Canadian plays or playwrights (62-70). That same year, Michael Tait concluded his survey of "the grey wastes of Canadian drama" from 1920-1960 by noting "perhaps the most depressing feature of theatre in Canada: the lack of any vital and continuing relationship between theatrical activity and the work of the Canadian playwright" (Klinck, 167).

Canadian theatre as it exists today has come into its own as an indigenous professional institution of value in the global theatre industry. For French Canada, modern drama had its inception with Gratien Gelinas' *Tit-Coq* in 1948. For English Canada, the key date is 1967: Centennial Year, the year of Expo in Montreal, and of the first and last all-Canadian Dominion Drama Festival. With due respect to artists working prior to 1967, such as Robertson Davies, Herman Voaden and James Reaney, whose plays expanded the repertoire of plays in English Canada, 1967 was also the year that English-Canadian drama began to achieve the legitimacy it experiences today.

This was the year in which dramatic writing and professional theatre production coincided on a widespread scale.

In 1967, Canadian-written plays were so strong that amateur companies presented sixty-two of them in French and English in the Dominion Drama Festival competitions, twenty-nine of which were performed for the first time. More important were the successes of the new plays given professional productions, literally from coast to coast, as part of the Centennial celebrations: Gelinas' *Yesterday the Children Were Dancing* in an English translation at the Charlottetown Festival; Reaney's *Colours in the Dark* in Stratford; Ann Henry's *Lulu Street* in Winnipeg; John Coulter's *The Trial of Louis Riel* in Regina; George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* in Vancouver. Audiences and critics from across the country, supported by a new national self-consciousness and pride, were taking note of this latest cultural phenomenon – good, stage worthy plays, written by Canadian playwrights, performed by Canadian actors in Canadian theatres. As well, Canadian playwrights began to receive international recognition, such as Toronto's John Herbert who had a major hit in New York with *Fortune and Men's Eyes*.

These events, and the subsequent spread of Canadian drama across the country over the next decade, seem to be products of a

particular historical moment, similar to the European theatre that appeared in the 1870s, the American theatre of the 1920s and the British theatrical renaissance of the mid-1950s. Yet all these movements were results of social and cultural forces that had been gathering momentum for many years. In the case of Canadian theatre, the revolution of 1967 was rooted in an evolutionary process that began to take shape clearly around the time of the First World War.

In this introduction, I discuss the major events and individuals who influenced the theatre industry in Canada between 1949 and 1967 in order to place the events discussed in this thesis in their proper historical perspective.

Prior to the First World War, amateur groups such as Toronto's Arts and Letters Club Players devoted themselves to performing contemporary works from the world repertoire as an alternative to the predictable, commercial fare offered by the circuit touring companies which consisted of imported talent. Inspired by the vogue of European art theatres at the turn of the century – especially the Irish Abbey Theatre in Dublin, which provided a strong positive model for Canadians – Toronto's Arts and Letters Club became one of the first

contributors in the twentieth century to an indigenous Canadian theatre. However, one thing that became clear in the midst of these initial stirrings of the twentieth century was that a genuine Canadian theatre would need its own dramatists. Fred Jacobs, author of "Waiting For A Dramatist" for *The Canadian Magazine*, concluded in 1914 that "There are no signs as yet upon our literary horizon of the arrival of our dramatist, but we are waiting expectantly, for we feel that he should soon come now" (146). Four years later, theatre pioneer Vincent Massey, in his article "The Prospects of a Canadian Drama" for *Queen's Quarterly*, concluded that "if we are to have a Canadian drama we must have a Canadian theatre in which to produce it" (200).

Under Massey's auspices, both of these ideals began to take form with the creation of Hart House Theatre in 1919. Hart House Theatre consisted of a well-equipped building which still stands today, as well as a company of the most talented actors, designers and directors in Toronto, dedicated to doing plays that would otherwise have gone unproduced in that city, many of which were written by Canadians. Ultimately, these plays created a discourse separate from that arising from the touring and commercial plays that were abundant in Toronto. Encouraged by this new venue, and its

progressive mandate, dramatists did arrive, enough to fill two volumes of *Canadian Plays from Hart House Theatre* by 1927. One such dramatist who emerged from Hart House Theatre was Merrill Denison, whose satirical comedy *Brothers in Arms* (1922), and his 1923 published collection *The Unheroic North*, established him as "Canada's first playwright of note" (Rubin, 19). Unable to make a living as a writer for the stage in Canada, Denison eventually moved to the United States in 1931 to write for American radio. Following Denison's departure, although Hart House continued to remain a focal point of the developing Canadian theatre production for many more years, its promotion of new plays was not consistent.

Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, amateur theatre flourished under the umbrella of the Little Theatre movement, a burgeoning of homegrown playmaking in large and small communities on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border. Canadian journalist Rupert Caplan wrote in an article "The Ultimate National Theatre" for *Canadian Forum*: "[these small companies] build the foundation for more mature creative theatres and develop an audience for the Ultimate National Canadian theatre" (143-44.) That ideal of a National Theatre seemed to move a large step closer to realisation with the establishment of the Dominion Drama Festival in October

1932, a nation-wide competition organised under the patronage of the new Governor General, Lord Bessborough, and chaired by Vincent Massey. The Festival was to consist of an annual series of regional playoffs climaxing in a final competition to be held in a different city each year, at which various awards would be given for production and performance. Community theatres, school and university drama groups and such established amateur companies as Hart House were all eligible, and adjudicators would provide helpful comments while also determining winners. The aim of the Festival was to showcase theatre in Canada while simultaneously upgrading the quality of Canada's theatrical arts and crafts through competition and cross-fertilization.

During the years of its existence (1933-70 with a hiatus from 1940-46 due to the Second World War), the DDF helped institutionalize amateur theatre in Canada. It provided a forum to showcase Canadian talent that often went on to New York, London, or Hollywood, and by the 1950s and 1960s, to Stratford and other areas of the nascent Canadian professional theatre. Through special trophies and cash prizes, the DDF also encouraged the writing and production of Canadian plays, an encouragement which proved impressive, at least statistically. In 1934, the Festival organizers

could come up with just nine Canadian titles for inclusion on its list of suggested plays sent to participating groups. However, by 1966 the list contained 240 Canadian titles in English alone, demonstrating the enormous increase in and encouragement for Canadian-written work between these years. But the quality and adventurousness of the new work the Festival inspired were sometimes questionable. Even as late as 1967, the DDF refused to allow Michel Tremblay's contentious *Les Belles Soeurs* to be produced as part of its all-Canadian celebrations. As critic Joel Michaels of the *Globe and Mail* explains:

> In all the years of the Dominion Drama Festival, never before has it seen a play as challenging, as fresh and as invigorating as [Tremblay's] *Les Belles Soeurs*; a literary testament to the new surge of work coming from a very welcome generation of artists emerging in this country. And it is perhaps for this reason that the DDF has denounced the play's inclusion in the final celebration. Shame on you. (Klinck, 167)

An earlier indictment of the limitations of the DDF was its inability to contend with the multi-media expressionism of Herman Voaden's plays, which consistently failed to advance beyond regional competitions in the 1930s because the "adjudicators did not know what to make of them" (Wagner, 19-21). Voaden was an ardent

nationalist and theatrical innovator who desired a Canadian dramatic art as distinctive as the paintings of the Group of Seven. To that end, he sponsored a playwriting competition in Toronto in 1929 that required each play to be set in the Canadian North, and suggested that the play's subject or mood was to be based on the writer's favourite Canadian painting. Voaden himself combined an obsession with the Canadian landscape and such disparate theatrical influences as modern dance, Wagnerian opera and symbolist drama to create a style of writing he called "symphonic expressionism" in plays with titles like *Rocks*, *Earth Song* and *Hill-Land*. He was also responsible for The Play Workshop, an organization he ran from 1934 to 1936 with the aim of encouraging Canadian playwriting and an indigenous theatrical style, which ultimately resulted in the production of twenty-five new works. However, this body of Canadian dramatic literature was not produced subsequently by other groups. For all his eccentric and sometimes brilliant work as playwright, producer, director and educator, Voaden probably made his greatest impact on the development of Canadian drama as a persistent lobbyist for increased government support for the theatre. His passion ultimately led to his election as the first president of the Canadian Arts Council in 1945.

The Play Workshop and Hart House were not the only centres of Canadian playwriting activity. A group of women journalists organized the Playwrights' Studio Group in Toronto in 1932 and by the end of the decade they had produced more than fifty new plays, mainly society comedies. At the other end of the spectrum were the Progressive Arts Clubs in Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver, consisting of leftists workers' theatre groups that created and performed agitprop and social protest plays throughout the Depression years. Meanwhile, in Alberta, the Banff School of Theatre was founded in 1933, later evolving into the Banff School of Fine Arts, which is still an important centre for theatre training and workshop production. Associated with Banff from the beginning was Gwen Pharis Ringwood, whose stark prairie tragedies *Still Stands The House* and *Dark Harvest* were among the strongest Canadian plays of the 1930s and 1940s, and Ringwood remained a prolific and popular dramatist in amateur circles until her death in 1984.

Probably the most significant development of the 1930s and 1940s in terms of the creation of a genuine Canadian drama was the rise of radio. The CNR (Canadian National Radio) Company was formed in 1927, and broadcast radio plays to passengers aboard the Canadian National Railway. The CBC (Canadian Broadcasting

Company) was established in 1932, and began broadcasting radio plays in 1936 for which it actually paid writers, producers, directors, actors, musicians and technicians. What came to be known as "The Golden Age" of Canadian radio began when Andrew Allan became Supervisor of Drama for CBC and producer of its weekly *Stage* series. Under Allan from 1944 to 1955, *Stage* and *Wednesday Night* created consistently bold and imaginative drama that maintained high standards of excellence while proving broadly popular. The stable of writers and actors that Allan assembled was hailed by Jack Gould of the New York Times as being "far and away the most exciting repertory group that can be heard" (Sec. II, 7). CBC Radio became Canada's equivalent of a national professional theatre industry. Hundreds of original scripts by Allan's house writers such as Lister Sinclair and Len Peterson were produced for broadcast. However, with the advent of television in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Golden Age of radio began to fade, forcing Canadian artists to find another outlet with which to utilize their talents and skills.

In spite of the varied successes of the DDF and CBC, neither amateur theatre pieces nor radio drama amounted to a lasting tradition of real Canadian theatre. For example, John Coulter, who quickly became an award-winning DDF playwright, and, after

emigrating to Canada from Ireland in 1936, was one of the most frequently produced CBC dramatists, subsequently becoming a vocal critic of the Canadian theatre scene. In his article "Canadian Theatre and the Irish Exemplar," published in *Stage Voices* in 1938, he passionately held up Dublin's Abbey Theatre as a model for Canadians, a theatre "showing the Irish to themselves ... Irish mugs in Irish mirrors." Canadians too, he argued, could find dramatic subject matter in indigenous situations: "in prairie droughts and crop failures, in mining disasters, in the poverty of slum dwellers of city streets or country shacks. But if there were a great Canadian play," he concluded, "would Canadians bother to stage it? Till someday Americans or British do it and tell them not to be ashamed" (Anthony 19-20). After writing a series of plays set in Ireland, Coulter took his own advice and turned to Canadian history, about which he had already written for radio, and achieved his greatest success with a trilogy of stage plays about Louis Riel. First produced in 1950, *Riel* became an influence on later theatre practice, serving as a paradigm for the history plays of James Reaney and the Theatre Passe Muraille dramatists of the 1970s: revisionist Canadian history with the rebel or underdog as hero, presented as a synthesis of documentary and myth.

Coulter was fortunate that by the time *Riel* was ready for production, there was a company to produce it: the New Play Society, founded by Dora Mavor Moore in 1946. From 1950, the Society also included a drama school, one of whose students would be John Herbert, who later went on to act, design and stage manage for the company. Though the New Play Society remained active until 1971, its glory years were 1946 through 1950, when its full seasons of plays in the Royal Ontario Museum Theatre proved to many skeptics the viability of a professional Canadian stage. Its most substantial success was *Spring Thaw*, a musical revue satirizing all things topical in the Great White North, first staged in 1948 and remounted annually with increased popularity for the next twenty years.

Later, Toronto found itself with two more theatre companies that would supersede the New Play Society in importance: the Jupiter Theatre (1952) and the Crest (1954). A major Canadian playwright who was associated with the Crest was Robertson Davies, whose *A Jig for the Gypsy* and *Hunting Stuart* premiered at the theatre in 1954-55. Six years earlier, in 1948-49, Davies had already become English Canada's foremost playwright on the amateur circuit with *Eros at Breakfast*, *Overlaid*, and the full-length *Fortune, My Foe*, satires about what Davies called Canada's "emotional understimulation" (Grant,

64). Like the Crest itself, Davies remained a significant force in Canadian theatre until the mid-1960s, when his playwriting career gave way to his work as a novelist.

Aside from his playwriting, Davies' journalism made a strong contribution to the developing Canadian theatre in the 1940s and 1950s. Both in his own name and under the pseudonym of Samuel Marchbanks, he raised his voice, like Voaden and Coulter, in continual protest against the conditions under which would-be Canadian theatre professionals had to labour. In the book *The Well-Tempered Critic: One Man's View of Theatre and Letters in Canada*, an article of Davies' from 1952 is cited in which he attacks "the seedy amateurism which has afflicted the arts here for so long" (Grant, 66). No wonder, then, that he reacted with enthusiasm to the idea of a world-class Shakespeare festival theatre in Stratford, Ontario. Davies, along with Dora Mavor Moore and Festival organizer Tom Patterson, arranged for the innovative British producer-director Tyrone Guthrie to head the venture, and Stratford held its first season of two plays under a tent in the summer of 1953. The founding of the Stratford Festival in 1953 gave additional emphasis to the Canadian theatre industry, and was conceived to serve as a model for Canadian audiences and artists alike by providing professional, high-calibre

classical theatre for Canadian audiences. Guthrie imported Alec Guinness and Irene Worth to play the leads, and fleshed out the rest of the company with Canadian actors, a policy that by and large became standard for Stratford. Reviewing that first season, Davies concluded that it had given Canadians a new vision of the theatre:

> This cannot help but have its effect on work everywhere in the country. For one thing, many of our best Canadian actors are working at Stratford ... Are these actors, who have tasted the wine of true theatre, ever again to be satisfied with the sour slops of under-rehearsed, under-dressed, under-mounted, under-paid, and frequently ill-considered and ill-financed theatre projects? ... The Stratford Festival is an artistic bombshell, exploded just at the time when Canadian theatre is most ready for a break with the dead past and a leap into the future. (Grant, 74)

There is no doubt that the Stratford Festival did have an enormous impact on theatre, and the idea of theatre, in Canada. It became an event of international importance and influence as actors from the United States and London, such as Jessica Tandy, Vanessa Redgrave, Maggie Smith, Brian Bedford, and Arthur Hill all performed at the Stratford Festival. Thus it raised the profile of theatre in

Canada as nothing else had been able to do and served as a focus of national and cultural pride. The Stratford Festival also became a training ground for many of the best actors who emerged in Canada over the next three decades, making stars of Christopher Plummer, Frances Hyland and others. Later, in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Canadian Players, which toured as a national professional Canadian company, was essentially a winter Stratford, with the Stratford actors doing a classical repertoire. Moreover, it was argued that:

> Stratford created a model for indigenous Canadian theatre: a non-profit organization, unconcerned with the values of New York, unashamedly using imported personnel where Canadian expertise was lacking, equally unashamedly welcoming subsidy support in return for placing its destiny at a policy-making level – in the hands of a volunteer citizen Board of Governors, and representatives of the community in which it found itself. (Hendry, 64-65).

But Stratford did little to effect or support the development of Canadian playwriting. Writers such as Herbert and Reaney would receive workshop and small-scale public performances of their plays at Stratford in the late 1960s, and in 1971, a Third Stage was added in part to produce Canadian work. But by that time, Stratford was no

longer an adequate model for a profes fessional Canadian theatre. With its huge financial operation, and its fo focus on non-Canadian plays, it had become a cultural dinosaur, devo vouring large subsidies at the expense of smaller theatres whose pr productions of Canadian plays, often on shoestring budgets, began to to be perceived as being more central to an emerging national dram ma than a theatre devoted to Shakespeare.

On the horizon, however, was s the Canada Council, whose founding in 1957 would change the e nature of theatre in Canada more than any other single development, p providing a sudden influx of government funding for buildings, co companies, and individuals engaged in the arts. With this organ nization, all areas, regions, and provinces of Canada now had the op pportunity to expand their respective theatre industries.

The origins of the Canada Cou uncil can be traced to 1949, when Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent pu t forward to the Privy Council a report suggesting the formation of a Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences. This Commission would examine the national develop ment in these various industries in Canada, and would make recomm nendations as to how the

government could best financially promote and encourage individuals and organizations in these fields.

By the time the Royal Commission, headed by University of Toronto Chancellor Vincent Massey, was ready to conclude its findings in 1951, it reported that Canada was quickly losing its culture and identity in the arts industry. In the study, the Commissioners suggest that:

> our use of American institutions, or our lazy, even abject, imitation of them has caused an uncritical acceptance of ideas and assumptions which are alien to our tradition ...a vast and disproportionate amount of material coming from a single alien source may stifle rather than stimulate our own creative effort; and passively accepted without any standard of comparison, this may weaken critical faculties. We are now spending millions to maintain a national independence which would be nothing but an empty shell without a vigorous and distinctive cultural life. We have seen that we have its elements in our traditions and in our history; we have made important progress, often aided by American generosity. We must not be blind, however, to the very present danger of permanent dependence. (15-18)

As well, the Royal Commission stressed the need for urgent action to speed up the development of the English-speaking Canadian theatre industry. The Commission clearly states that Canada was "not deficient in theatrical talent, whether in writing for the stage, in producing or in acting; but this talent at present finds little encouragement and no outlet apart from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation" (195).

As a result of these findings, the Canada Council was formed in 1957 to foster and promote the study, production, and enjoyment of works in the arts, humanities and social sciences. The organisation did much to replenish the arts industry in Canada, as theatre companies, festivals and performing houses emerged across the country. From an initial outlay of $2.6 million in arts grants in 1957, the Council's investment in individuals and groups totaled more than $60 million by 1970, a quantum leap in the funds available to fuel the engine of Canadian cultural nationalism. With support and encouragement from the Canada Council, a network of regional theatres spread across the country: Manitoba Theatre Centre (1958), Toronto Workshop Productions (1959), Niagara-on-the-Lake's Shaw Festival (1962), the Vancouver Playhouse (1963), Halifax's Neptune Theatre (1963), Prince Edward Island's Charlotteltown Festival (1964),

Edmonton's Citadel (1965), Regina's Globe (1966), St. John's Arts and Culture Centre (1967) and Theatre Calgary (1968).

Money was not the only catalyst for change, as co-operation and idealism were important factors as well. In Winnipeg, with virtually no capital, but with a missionary commitment to convert a whole province to the ideal of a regional professional theatre, Tom Hendry and John Hirsch merged their amateur Theatre 77 with the Winnipeg Little Theatre in 1958 to create the Manitoba Theatre Centre, with Hirsch as its first artistic director. In his article "MTC; A View from the Beginning" published in Canadian Theatre Review in 1976, Tom Hendry admits that from the start, the MTC "was meant to be more than a theatre, something that could in fact become a focus for all theatrical energy and resources in one community"(16). Combining mainstage productions in Winnipeg with a touring company, children's theatre and a school, the MTC succeeded so well in galvanizing the support and resources of its constituency that it became the basis for a new concept: "a Canadian national theatre that would be decentralized and regional, like the nation itself – a professional theatre version of the Canadian mosaic" (17).

By 1968, it seemed that Canada had indeed become aggressive and proactive in building a stronger foundation for its theatre

industry. The next question was one of identity: most of the plays being produced in Canada were clearly not Canadian. That is to say, Canadian theatre was not a theatre of Canada, nor one written by Canadians, but merely one that existed in Canada. For example, in 1967, a study conducted by Canada's Department of Arts and Letters, found that in the previous year, seven of the major regional theatres had produced the work of a total of only two Canadian dramatists. Moreover, the playwrights were paid less than $5,000 out of combined budgets of more than two million dollars (Gustafson, 84).

By the late1960s, Canada appeared to have lost its momentum towards what Herman Voaden called "the potential to achieve a great Renaissance in her art and literature" (Rubin, 78). Some of those artists who wrote prior to 1967, attempted to create viable drama in their area, and did so with some success, such as Robertson Davies, left theatre to pursue other careers. Other plays written by Canadians that did have success prior to 1967 were those that actually achieved acknowledgment in other countries, such as Mazo de la Roche's *Whiteoaks*, Brian Doherty's *Father Malachy's Miracle*, Patricia Joudry's *Teach Me How To Cry*, and Gwen Pharis Ringwood's *Still Stands the House*. In 1968, despite the existence of many theatre organizations across Canada, and the existence of many theatre venues, the

presence of Canadian playwriting on Canadian stages was still either absent entirely, or poorly represented. There was no meaningful connection between playwriting and theatre practice.

In Canada, prior to the 1970s, the relationship between professional theatre practice on the one hand, and the development of a dramatic literature on the other, had never existed as a functioning reality. There are many historical examples in other countries of theatre practice – especially the work of a particular professional theatre organisation – addressing itself systematically and rigorously to the ongoing development of the dramatic writing of one or more playwrights, particularly as their voice relates to the sensibilities and social outlook of the local audience. Examples include Grein's Independent Theatre and George Bernard Shaw; the Provincetown Playhouse and Eugene O'Neill; the Abbey Theatre and John Millington Synge; the Moscow Art Theatre and Anton Chekhov. At the time that Canadian theatre companies began to be established, this kind of practical and committed connection did not exist in any meaningful way in Canada. If one looks at the major theatre organizations or agencies that have existed in twentieth-century Canada – Hart House theatre; the Stratford Festival and its year-round counterpart, the Canadian Players; the New Play Society; the

Crest Theatre; the large regional theatres, including the Manitoba Theatre Centre, the Citadel, the Neptune, and others; not to mention the Dominion Drama Festival – none has consistently or systematically dedicated itself to the development of the work of promising playwrights. When such relationships have occurred – such as George Ryga and the Vancouver Playhouse, or Sharon Pollock and Theatre Calgary, or Merrill Denison and Hart House Theatre – they have been short, sometimes problematic, or part of a limited commitment by a particular artistic management that subsequently changed its mind.

Introduction II – The Emergence of Collective Creation

A connection between the playwrights' voice and theatrical practice had never been forged consistently in Canada. Denison's one-act plays were performed at Hart House Theatre as part of its limited and failed commitment to developing Canadian work; however, his full-length play *Marsh Hay* – clearly his best work – although written in 1923, was not performed there or anywhere else at that time. Herman Voaden produced his own plays in two different amateur venues – at Sarnia, and at Toronto's Central High School of Commerce – and although he wrote them in a style, and with technical requirements, that made them accessible to any small amateur theatre group in the country, his plays subsequently remained largely unperformed. Robertson Davies wrote his plays as part of his attachment to the Ottawa Drama League, and although they are rich in dialogue, character, and ideas, they were not subsequently produced by others with any frequency. By 1968, Canadian literature had amassed a large body of dramatic works, most of them untouched and unproduced since their creation. At the same time, as we have seen, there were many professional theatre organizations operating across Canada whose programs consisted almost entirely of non-Canadian plays. By 1968, these organizations

could be described as comprising a mainstream Canadian theatre movement.

However, working outside the mainstream in the 1950s and 1960s was a different kind of theatre entirely: a genre of theatre that had all the necessary components to build a grass-roots theatre movement, one that is not merely ensemble or company-driven, while at the same time developing dramatic writing as part of its ongoing work. This genre of theatre is collective creation. Although the approach to a collective creation differs from one collective creation to another, a play developed from using this genre consists primarily of participants being brought together in order to develop a performance text throughout the rehearsal period. Together, they develop the idea and research the topic. Then, throughout the rehearsal period, the participants develop the material of the play, creating scenes and characters, out of which the most promising would be further developed, and perhaps included in the performance text.

Collective creation, in twentieth-century English-speaking Canadian theatre, has been traced back to George Luscombe and his involvement with Toronto Workshop Productions, founded in 1959. For five years prior to his founding the company, Luscombe acted with Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop in Great Britain. When he returned to Canada in 1959, he founded Toronto Workshop

Productions, seeking to continue Littlewood's ideas of popular theatre. Through his involvement with Toronto Workshop Productions, Luscombe became the first director in Canada to explore collective creation. Luscombe continued to contribute to Canada's body of written material in its English-speaking theatre industry throughout his involvement in collective creation, developing his own tradition that found its greatest expression in the 1974 production of *Ten Lost Years.*

Another influence on the direction of the collective creation movement in English-speaking Canadian theatre was Peter Cheeseman, whose work at Stoke-on-Trent in England influenced the emerging Canadian alternative theatre scene. In 1965, Ken and Sue Kramer had worked with Brian Way's Theatre in Education program in Britain, where they had become acquainted with Cheeseman's collective creations. When the Kramers founded the Globe Theatre in Regina, Saskatchewan in 1968, their mission was to create plays like Cheeseman's. As a result, The Globe developed such plays as *No. 1 Hard* (1978), *Medicare!* (1980) and *Black Powder* (1981).

Peter Cheeseman also influenced another Canadian theatre artist, Ray Whalen. In 1972, Cheeseman visited Toronto as a guest of Theatre Ontario, an umbrella organisation of professional and amateur theatres. In that same year, Whalen worked with

Cheeseman as an assistant director. In 1974, Whalen and Sylvia Tucker founded Open Circle Theatre in Toronto to produce plays modeled after Cheeseman's work.

Collective creation provided a mechanism designed specifically to attach the idea of theatre practice to the creation of performance text. Although collective creations in the English-speaking Canadian theatre industry date back to as early as 1959, it was during the 1970s and early 1980s when they flourished across the country, becoming a defined and highly popular genre of theatre. It is because of their enormous popularity during the 1970s and early 1980s that makes this time significantly remembered as being "the era of the collective creation" (Wallace, 23).

Collective creation as a theatre practice is important to the development of dramatic writing not only because these rehearsal and development processes result in an immediate body of text, but also because it fosters an attitude, and teaches skills to implement the specific attitude that theatre practice and the development of dramatic text are connected. Also, people who have worked in collective creation have gone on to become involved in new play development as a major part of their professional theatre career.

Throughout the history of Canada's English-speaking theatre industry, several individuals worked in and contributed significantly

to this genre of theatre. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to concentrate on the work that Paul Thompson did during the 1970s and early 1980s at Theatre Passe Muraille, because of his enormous contribution to the genre and to the body of plays in Canada's English-speaking theatre industry. In the following chapters, I demonstrate how the collective creations that Thompson directed at Theatre Passe Muraille influenced various artists to continue to develop Canada's body of English written work for its theatre industry and become involved in new play development. Beginning with Paul Thompson and Theatre Passe Muraille, I explore his contribution to the company, as well as his contribution to and style as a director in the genre of collective creation.

Chapter 1 – Paul Thompson and Theatre Passe Muraille

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Theatre Passe Muraille was considered to be synonymous with one of its leading figures and Artistic Directors: Paul Thompson. Robert Wallace describes Paul Thompson in his article "Collective Waves" by saying that he is "the embodiment of what Theatre Passe Muraille stands for" (25). Together, Thompson and Theatre Passe Muraille became symbols for the dedication to develop Canadian-written plays and to explore authentic Canadian subject matter. In this chapter, I outline the history of Theatre Passe Muraille, focusing on the work that Paul Thompson did during his Artistic Directorship. In so doing, I establish his contribution to laying the groundwork for other artists who worked in the collective creation genre in English-speaking Canadian theatre. In order to demonstrate Thompson's style in and approach to this genre of theatre, I use as examples two of Thompson's most celebrated collective creations, *The Farm Show*, and *1837: The Farmers' Revolt*. As well, in order to show Paul Thompson's impact on the collective creation genre in English-speaking Canadian theatre, I cite examples of theatre companies and their plays that were developed from mirroring the example that Paul Thompson had established.

Founded in 1968 by Jim Gerrard, and located at Rochdale College near the University of Toronto's downtown campus, Theatre Passe Muraille provided an alternative to the mainstream productions that were abundant in other theatre companies in southern Ontario, such as the Stratford Festival and Shaw Festival. In her book *The Canadian Dramatist Volume Two: Playwrights of the Collective Creation*, Diane Bessai quotes Jim Garrard extensively about his original efforts at Theatre Passe Muraille. Jim Garrard summarizes these as being, "an exploration of the theatre in society and of the educational value for society." Accordingly, Rochdale College would serve "as a laboratory to study the relationship between theatre and environment." Most tellingly, it would be "a theatre free of distinctions between actor and spectator, between 'inside' and 'outside' the theatre." Garrard often spoke of wanting "to make theatre as popular as bowling". To achieve this, an acting ensemble of approximately 15 people "who work well together, who have a dialogue" would be "the resource" (33).

However, while Jim Garrard made serious efforts to discover, address and connect with the audience of Theatre Passe Muraille during his Artistic Directorship, his choice of plays tended to reflect the interests and focuses of American youth and their counter-culture. During its first two seasons, Theatre Passe Muraille

produced such Canadian-written plays as John Palmer's *Memories for My Brother* and George Luscombe's *Chicago '70*, as well as work from abroad, such as Rochelle Owen's *Futz*, Paul Foster's *Tom Paine*, Terence McNally's *Sweet Eros*, and John Lennon's *In His Own Write*. Garrard attributes the American influence on Theatre Passe Muraille's choice of plays during its first two seasons to the American draft-dodgers who entered Canada to avoid conscription into the Vietnam War. The presence in Toronto, and in the Theatre Passe Muraille audience, of these American expatriates provided Theatre Passe Muraille with a political, cultural and creative energy that contributed to the initial growth of the theatre company.

With Theatre Passe Muraille's mandate and choice of plays for its first two seasons in mind, it can be argued that in the early days of its existence, despite the company's attempt to explore different avenues in the theatre industry, it did not foster the growth of work in the body of English-speaking Canadian plays. Gerrard's intent of Theatre Passe Muraille was to establish itself as a theatre company determined to explore alternatives to mainstream Canadian English-speaking theatre, to expand Canada counter-culture, and to develop Canadian artists, audiences, and the industry itself. However, the inspiration it found from the counter-culture of the United States, and its inclusion of American work into its first two seasons, did little to

develop the authentic Canadian voice that the English-speaking Canadian theatre industry so desperately needed. Instead, Theatre Passe Muraille found inspiration from a culture that had immigrated into Canada from abroad, and theatrically explored its own history, art, and politics. The company did this, as opposed to exploring Canada's own history, art and politics through the inclusion of more Canadian-written works that existed prior to and during the immigration of these foreign expatriates into Canada.

All this was to change at the theatre company with the work of Paul Thompson. Thompson, after graduating with a degree in French from the University of Western Ontario in 1964, attended classes at the Sorbonne in France for a year. During this time, Thompson exposed himself to as much avant-garde theatre as he could, including the work of Roger Planchon, whose ideas of populist theatre sparked Thompson's interest.

Two years later, after returning to Canada to work on a Master of Arts degree on Antonin Artaud at the University of Toronto, Thompson was accepted to work at Planchon's Theatre de la Cite de Villeurbanne, where Planchon had been since 1957 developing a theatre for factory workers. Thompson's extensive background in French became most useful to Planchon, as Planchon had been producing classics of the French and English theatre, and was giving

the plays a social and political relevance to contemporary life. These plays were given a fresh perspective and interpretation that developed a new generation of theatre audiences who were interested in what the theatre had to say to them. Thompson assisted Planchon in the translation and staging of such plays as Sean O'Casey's *Purple Dust* and John Arden's *Last Goodnight*. Thompson was inspired by Planchon's ability to develop a direct co-relation between the material being presented on stage, the manner of its presentation, and the audience. Planchon had done this primarily by getting the people from the audience involved in the play. As Thompson explains:

> [Planchon] told me that if I wanted to get audiences into theatre, I had to make them interested in what was going on. He was the first person who told me to put audience members physically on stage. Get them involved. Get them in what is happening. He brought people to the theatre, in the theatre, on the stage, in front of the stage, behind the stage. They were everywhere. He taught me techniques and gave me exercises that would help get authentic material, real material, based on what was being studied. Character work, plot work, every aspect of the play had an exercise or a game that would help him along. He created a theatre that was not about making a

professional theatre, but about making plays for the audience. (Personal Interview, June 17, 1998)

Before returning to Canada, Thompson did a grand tour of European theatres, courtesy of a Canada Council grant. Through this experience, Thompson became familiar with more theatre across the continent, how it differed from his Canadian frame of reference, and, more importantly, what he could learn from it.

Upon returning to Canada, Thompson worked intensively in various theatres across Ontario. In the summers of 1965 and 1966, he worked at Keith Turnbull's summer theatre in London, Ontario. As well, Thompson went to the Stratford Festival for the 1968 and 1969 seasons and worked with Jean Gascon on *Tartuffe*, and with Douglas Campbell on *La Cenerentola*, as part of the new assistant-director program there. As a result of the Stratford Festival's new program of drama workshops led by Powys Thomas, Thompson also directed young actors in workshop productions. Such productions include Michael Ondaatje's *The Man With Seven Toes*, Jose Triano's *The Criminals*, Sam Shepard's *Red Cross*, and Thompson's own adaptation of a separatist theme from Jacques Hebert, entitled *Merde Is A Four-Letter Word*. During the winters, Thompson directed some lunch-time productions at Instanttheatre (soon to become Centaur) in Montreal.

While Thompson's involvement in new work at this time was quite prolific, he was still discouraged by the work that was being developed by these theatre companies. Primarily, Thompson was upset with the degree to which the plays had been influenced by the national identities of other countries, and by their failure to exhibit any style that could be called unique or Canadian. As he explains:

> I was doing a lot. There was a lot of work being done. But it was all the same. They were the same as the plays that I was doing at Stratford and the plays that were being done at Shaw. They had the same style, the same stories, the same classical structure. Everyone was trying to make the three-act, beginning, middle and end, well-made play and I wanted to break away from that. Why couldn't we write a three-act, end, beginning, middle great Canadian play? It could happen. (Personal Interview, June 17, 1998.)

Therefore, by the time he began working with Gascon on *Tartuffe* during his second season at Stratford, Thompson felt restricted by the theatre company's essentially conservative atmosphere. As Thompson says:

> [Stratford] was doing all the same plays. They were all Shakespearean and classical, done Shakespearean and classical. There was no imagination. No new ground was being

> forged. It was monotonous. It was boring. It was the largest theatre company in Canada and it was killing me artistically. I wanted to see what else there was. I knew that the kind of work done at Stratford was there; it's been there for hundreds of years. What's was new about it? What was refreshing about it? Nothing. I wanted something exciting.

After finishing a two-year term at the Stratford Festival, Thompson was ready to explore other avenues to fulfill his artistic talent and interests. When Thompson joined Theatre Passe Muraille as a stage manager in late 1969, he was intent on developing Canadian work; plays that he would find both refreshing and invigorating. As his experience in stage management grew, so did his interest in directing, and it was through this later position that would foster his interest in developing new Canadian plays.

Thompson's first work for Theatre Passe Muraille as a director was on the play *Notes From Quebec*, staged in May of 1970. A theatrical satire on a contemporary Quebec family, in which a father, mother and son speak in monologues about their frustrations and fantasies, then turn into dogs, this play remained consistent with the theatre company's counter-culture aesthetic. While it is identified in Theatre Passe Muraille's records as an adaptation, it has been described by Diane Bessai (35), as well as Thompson himself

(Personal Interview, June 17, 1998), as a collective creation, freely translated from *Diguidi, Diguidi, Ha, Ha, Ha!*:

The script began as collective verbal improvisations by Jean-Claude Germain at Théâtre du Même Nom, where Germain was co-ordinator and animateur. Thompson had become aware of the play while working the previous year in Montreal. Renate Usmiani describes the work in its final form as "genuine theatre of liberation" (qtd. Bessai 35), exemplifying the kind of revolutionary and aggressive energy in Quebec's collective theatre of the time, an energy which appealed to Thompson.

In *Notes from Quebec*, as performed by Danny Freedman, Clare Coulter and Don Steinhouse, Thompson took liberties with the original, retaining only those elements of the play that worked for his own actors. This play became a starting point for Thompson and Theatre Passe Muraille, as the two progressively developed a reputation for presenting theatre with a foundation more firmly planted in Canadian culture, history and politics. As Thompson explains:

> *Notes from Quebec* was the first opportunity I had to use the talents of other artists to compose a play. I was no longer working from an existing text. I was creating one. I, along with all these other artists, was developing a play. A play that could

stand in the Canadian canon. I

I was doing what I wanted to do It was invigorating. It was where

plays and fill that void that was o all along: develop Canadian

Following this season, because s so apparent in the industry.

theatre company, Paul Thompson bec of his familiarity with the

Passe Muraille in 1971, following Ma ecame Artistic Director of Theatre

Garrard. At Theatre Passe Muraille, artin Kinch, who had succeeded

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with him, his capacity to surprise bo ss to the ideas of people working

his focus on what Thompson calls "n oth performers and audience, and

being" (qtd. Bessai 32). As a result, man as a political and social

theatre to the people of Toronto in th Thompson attempted to bring

he same manner as Planchon. As

Thompson explains:

> I tried to bring the audiences i
> in the theatre, on the stage, in the
> house, in the wings, everywhe
> re. I filled the theatre with the
> audience that we were writing
> for. I got their presence, the
> presence of the people of the P
> asse Muraille audience, to fuel
> the work being generated. It w
> vasn't a theatre for the artistic
> elite who were providing acade
> mic analyses of what we were
> doing; it was a theatre for Tor
> onto audiences and Canadian
> audiences.

Thompson followed *Notes from Quebec*, his first collective creation at Theatre Passe Muraille, with other collective creations that were to serve as experiments; they were an opportunity for him to explore collective creation, and how he could function within it as a director. As Thompson explains:

> I needed to hone some of my skills. I needed to see what other artists were in Canada who could work in this kind of atmosphere. I needed to test the waters. I needed to determine, for myself, whether or not this was something that could work ... With *Notes from Quebec*, I tried my hand at it, but that didn't necessarily mean I was an expert. I had to do some other things before I could get really comfortable with the collective creation genre and see what else could be done with it.

Thompson's first collective creation after *Notes from Quebec* was *Doukhobors*, which was staged in April 1971, and *Free Ride*, staged the following October. In May of 1972, Thompson assisted playwright Carol Bolt with the development of *Buffalo Jump* by means of improvisation with actors in what was essentially a collective creation milieu. Despite the intent of these plays, the reviews from critics were never strongly in favour of the productions. Ray Conologue described *Free Ride* as being "a bland presentation of mildly professional work" (*Toronto Star*, October 4, 1971, C4). As well, Thomas Wells described

Buffalo Jump as a play that "never rose above a level of interest" (*The Globe and Mail*, May 29, 1972, D5). In retrospect, Paul Thompson admits that although these plays were viewed as mediocre by the critics, the topics of these plays provided Thompson with an opportunity to explore Canada and its various politics, problems and aesthetics. As well, these plays enabled Thompson to become actively involved in presenting authentic Canadian material and subject matter in a way that was distinct from that found in mainstream British and American theatre. As a result, Thompson had embraced as his own a genre of theatre that creates Canadian text which possess a Canadian voice as a result of working with Canadians, who address themselves seriously to their task. By preparing himself by means of these three early collective creations, Paul Thompson became familiar with the genre and how he could function within it as a director. Essentially, these plays and their style of development prepared Thompson for his tour de force, *The Farm Show*, which was staged in September of 1972.

Paul Thompson was inspired to do *The Farm Show* while teaching a course at Brock University in 1972. With Ted Johns, at the time a fellow instructor, Thompson generated the idea of going into a community to develop a play about its own experiences. Days later, Johns returned with a concrete proposal. He had a relative with

an empty farmhouse that Thompson might be able to use. The farm was owned by Ray Bird of Clinton, and was located close to Listowel, Ontario, the town where Thompson had grown up. Since Thompson was already familiar with the town, he was aware of what possibilities lay ahead in a theatrical exploration of Clinton, thereby prompting him to take Johns' offer.

Thompson then gathered a group of actors, offering thirty-five dollars a week and free accommodation in the farmhouse, and began researching the town of Clinton in August of 1972. The cast consisted of Anne Anglin, Fiona MacDonell, Janet Amos, Miles Potter and David Fox. A sixth actor, Alan Jones, quit the show after its first performance, disagreeing with one of Thompson's requirements. Having grown up on a farm, Jones was familiar with the work that was required on a farm and found such work miserably hard. Jones argued against Thompson's requirement that the actors gather their research by assisting the farmers in their work. This objection from Jones shows that Thompson was asking his actors to take research to a very personal and truthful level. Also, because of the truthfulness of this research, the group would explore and present Canadian subject matter in an equally personal and honest manner. When Jones left, Thompson took his place for the subsequent tour; in the revival the following year, Ted Johns replaced him.

Thematically, *The Farm Show* is not only about an Ontario farming community. It is also a play about what the actors experienced during the course of researching the material. The performance showcases these experiences and the actors' growing consciousness as they make sense of the lives of the farmers. The play is therefore about one community looking at another.

I now include a detailed account of various stages in the development of *The Farm Show* in order to illustrate the constant interaction between process and product. First, I explore the exercises Thompson incorporated into the development of *The Farm Show* in order to illustrate how the material generated within these exercises fuels various scenes and characters for the play. Next I examine the play's structure in order to demonstrate how the individual scenes that were created through the rehearsal process came together as a unified, theatrical event. Finally, I discuss the use, creation and development of monologues in order to demonstrate how an actor's personal experience can be transformed into a theatrical experience. As an example, I lay out the process that Miles Potter followed in taking a monologue from improvisation to performance.

The specific theatrical techniques used to build the play can be explained by the actors' exercises that Thompson initiated. These

exercises gave the actors the basic tools to transform their perceptions and experiences into theatrical gesture, and at the same time they were building blocks for the play itself. The five principal exercises were: 'portraits' of local characters; 'landscapes', in which the actors were asked to create visual images; 'mythologising'; 'show and tell'; and 'transformations', turning objects into something else.

In the course of a typical rehearsal, the actors would work through many such exercises, the most promising of which would be noted as potential scenes. For example, it was the 'portraits' exercise that developed the character studies so prevalent in *The Farm Show*. According to Thompson, "even though we particularized a character like Jean Lobb right down to the way she laughed, we somehow made a connection with something larger" (qtd. Filewod 39). Here, the audience sees what Thompson refers to by realizing that collective creations have a larger social purpose than individual psychology; the cast is not only presenting individuals, but the entire culture of Clinton that is made up of those individuals. For Thompson, he was able to represent, not only an authentic individual, but the composite identity of an entire Canadian community. We also see, in Michael Ondaatje's documentary film *The Clinton Special*, which was about the 1973 revival of *The Farm Show*, how this process works in practice. One scene in that film shows us David Fox's representation of farmer

Les Jervis, and juxtaposes it with footage of Jervis himself. In the rehearsal exercise, Thompson asked the actors to represent their characters in a manner that the Clinton audiences could identify them. After the production, Jervis comments that Fox "mimicked me pretty good," suggesting that Thompson had succeeded in making a town identifiable through theatrical devices.

Piecing the play together became a task all its own. *The Farm Show* is not structured to express particular themes; themes emerge out of the theatrical arrangement of the material. The first act charts the territory of the play, marking the boundaries of the community. The logic of the first act is associative: the scenes form a general collage, while they simultaneously describe the process by which the play was made. The act moves from the general to the specific, from the montage of impressions in 'Round the Bend,' which gives the audience seventeen different characters, all of whom are neighbours, to the public celebrations of Orange Day held in Clinton, to the detailed portraits of the local townspeople, ending with a segment about women. By the end of the first act, the community has been defined by the patterns of its daily life and work.

In the second act, the play looks more closely at the life cycles of the community. It begins with Janet Amos' Jean Lobb monologue, in which she describes in detail the various weddings in her family.

This is followed by the "Lobb son
s", naming Jean Lobb's family, which
became a vignette between scene
s throughout the rest of the play.
Three monologues follow this, fol
owed by the "Jesus Bus" scene, in
which Diane Lobb describes the
rip she took with her husband and
another couple to Halifax to brin
back a double-decker bus for her
evangelical church. This then mo
ves into the Township Council
scenes and various celebrations
eld in Clinton. Following the
council scene, the play moves in
o its final segment, with act 2 scene
7, "Picture Frame", which preced
s the final verse of the Lobb song.
The Picture Frame is a theatrica
metaphor depicting changing
attitudes towards farming. Five
ctors stand in a row while a large
wooden frame is lowered in front
of them. As two of the actors,
representing a husband and wife
describe the history of their farm,
their children in turn step out of
the frame and tell the audience why
they chose to leave it. The scene
ends when an auctioneer sells the
picture.

In Ondaatje's documentary *The Clinton Special*, Miles Potter explains the transformation of da
ta from research to fully realized
theatrical expression by describin
g the development of one particular
scene: a monologue describing th
e miserable day he and another
actor spent helping farmer Mervy
n Lobb store hay in his barn. Potter
said that he had come home to th
e farmhouse from baling hay, tired

and angry with Thompson for putting him through the ordeal. In rehearsal the next day, he described the work to vent his rage, and found that telling the story acquired unintended humour as the other cast members began laughing at his account.

In the end, the scene developed into a monologue in which Potter tells the story in the past tense, but performs it in the theatrical present, miming the work and mimicking the sounds of the machinery. The monologue builds into a graphic, extremely funny and physically demanding scene. At the conclusion of the story, Miles collapses in exhaustion – made even more real by the strenuous physicality of the scene – and says to the audience, "Now I ask you ... why? Why would any human being choose, for the better part of his life, twice a year to put himself through this total and utter hell? I didn't understand then and I don't understand it now" (Theatre Passe Muraille, 43).

With *The Farm Show*, Thompson essentially defined the collective creation genre in English-speaking Canadian theatre. *The Farm Show* has been hailed as a monumental theatre piece, not only in the genre of collectively created plays, but also in the canon of English-speaking Canadian theatre. As Alan Filewod claims in his book *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada*:

> The dominant form of Canadian documentary had its birth in an unused barn near Clinton, Ontario, in August, 1972, when Theatre Passe Muraille premiered *The Farm Show* to an audience of local residents and farmers. *The Farm Show* is important both as a play and a cultural phenomenon. It stands as one of the finest works of the Canadian theatre, and it became the model for a form of community documentary theatre based on the actors' personal responses to the source material. *The Farm Show* inspired numerous imitations across Canada, most of which applied techniques of collective creation developed by Passe Muraille's artistic director, Paul Thompson. (24)

Robert C. Nunn, in his article "The Meeting of Actuality and Theatricality in *The Farm Show*" as published in *Canadian Drama*, cites *The Farm Show* as being the play "which indicated the rich potential of the [collective creation] form, and indeed remains an exemplar" (42).

The Farm Show was indeed a coup for the English-speaking Canadian theatre industry. With this play, Thompson addressed Canadian issues by presenting a community specifically, clearly, and theatrically in the genre of collective creation. In December 1972, Paul Thompson began work on another collective creation that would

confirm his standing as a leading figure in the collective creation genre in English-speaking Canadian theatre: *1837: The Farmers' Revolt.*

It is difficult to discuss the development of *1837: The Farmer's Revolt* without mentioning its original version, called simply *1837*, since the first version proved to be an important stepping-stone to the subsequent published version. As well, as was demonstrated with *The Farm Show*, collective creations in Canada are continually concerned with portraying Canadian subject matter with which the audience is directly familiar. In the case of *1837*, and *1837: The Farmers' Revolt*, the Canadian content was of utmost importance, as it dealt with historical information from the war of 1837 between Upper and Lower Canada. Therefore, I will explore the development of both versions, because it is important to demonstrate how the change in audience influenced the changes needed for the latter version of the play.

Rick Salutin, author of *1837: The Farmers' Revolt*, kept a diary during the play's development, and documented the progress of the play. I will refer to this diary throughout my discussion. Beginning with the entry date of "Fall, 1972", Salutin writes:

> Last year, while I was in rehearsal with a play called "Fanshen", about the Chinese Revolution, the director said, "Now what we ought to do *next* year is --- Quebec!"
>
> Oh no, I thought. No more getting off on these exotic foreign revolutions. Next year if we do a revolution it will be right here in Ontario. (qtd. Wasserman 193)

Salutin then approached Paul Thompson, who had already established himself with *The Farm Show* and other works as a strong practitioner of Canadian subject-matter. The topic, and the opportunity to explore Canadian history, intrigued Thompson, and together they decided to explore the 1837 War between Upper and Lower Canada. For Thompson, "this era was the first time Canada became a country. It was a time Canadians showed a strong sense of passion towards their country. We wanted to capture that passion." Following the generation of the idea, he gathered a cast consisting of three women – Clare Coulter, Suzette Couture and Janet Amos; three men – Neil Vipond, Miles Potter and David Fox; and designer Paul Williams.

While the development of *1837: The Farmer's Revolt* follows a similar structure to that of *The Farm Show*, in that it is composed of research, improvisation and exercises, it possesses unique qualities in these areas, and uses other means to develop the text as well. For

example, it was the first of Thompson's collective creations to use an author – Rick Salutin – who would assist in the writing of the script and the placement of scenes for the performance. *The Farm Show*, by contrast, had been created completely by the contributors, with no external writer to assist them. I will begin my discussion of the development of *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* with the development of the earlier version, *1837*, demonstrating the gathering and use of research, the use of exercises, the use of rehearsal periods, and the play's initial opening. Then, I will explore reasons for the reworking of the script, as well as differences between the two versions.

Salutin later wrote that, once the actors had been chosen, research was the primary function in the development of the play. As he explains early in the play's development, on Sunday, December 3, 1972, he and the cast, along with Thompson and the designer, Paul Williams, on "drove out to the Niagara Peninsula", and on Thursday, December 7, they "paraded to Mackenzie House on Bond St." (193). On Monday, December 11, Salutin commented on "This matter of research: the material on 1837 is endless, to my surprise. The collective method takes the pressure off me for digesting all of it. Everyone reads like crazy. Mornings before we start, the rehearsal room looks like a library" (qtd. Wasserman 194).

This research was then used as material for scenes. For example, after the journey to Mackenzie's house on December 7, 1972, Thompson asked each of the actors to present an "1837 object". Salutin commented that the best object presented was Clare Coulter's, who set herself before the group and said, "I'm William Lyon Mackenzie's house. My feet are spread wide apart and are firmly planted. My hands are on my hips and I look straight ahead. I have *lots* of windows and any questions you ask me, I'm not afraid to answer" (qtd. Wasserman 193). Although ideas were still being generated, Salutin later wrote in his diary on Tuesday, December 12, 1972: "We're still concentrating on texture, and haven't begun to build scenes ... I've ransacked the records, talked with historians, writers, feminists" (qtd. Wasserman 194).

In Salutin's account of the play's development, Thompson had not applied a strict structure to the play, which, at this point, was approximately four weeks before opening night. Research was still being used to fuel various ideas. For example, Salutin remarks that on December 14, 1972:

> We tried Mackenzie's newspaper piece on the Family Compact today. It's a fine hatchet job. He numbers them from one to thirty, and cross references them by number. We did it with five people taking all the roles – switching ... I gave Miles

> [Potter] *The Canadian Farmer's Travels in the U.S.A.* to read. Written by an Upper Canadian farmer named Davis in 1836. I discovered it in the rare book room of the public library ... More texturing: we've given everyone a minor character to do from the time. Someone who's barely mentioned in the records. Sally Jordan, who worked for Anne Langton, who wrote a journal. Ira Anderson, innkeeper, who's on the arrest record. A name mentioned in Mackenzie's paper as seconding a motion at a meeting. They must build their character according to what they know of the time. We'll quiz the actors in coming days on what may come out of it, but more important is the *thickness* – to pour into and onto whatever and whoever we end up using.
>
> (qtd. Wasserman 195)

Following Planchon's example, and the example he established himself with his earlier collective creations, Thompson continually incorporated exercises into the development of the piece throughout the rehearsal process, in order to discover what could be used for the actual text of the play. An example of one such exercise Thompson used for *1837* is the "picture" exercise, which he integrated into the rehearsal process on Wednesday, December 30, 1972, approximately two and a half weeks prior to opening night. Here, Thompson told the actors they had five minutes to look through the various books and

sources, choose an image, and present it. The most successful of these was the "head" that was conceived by Janet Amos. She constructed the head by taking Suzette Couture and Neil Vipond, who formed the eyes with their heads and the nose with their arms, as Clare Coulter formed the mouth. This image eventually became the head of Lieutenant Governor Francis Bond Head in the play. In performance, one of the "eyes" delivered a speech of Bond Head's that conveyed the essence of the Imperial attitude.

Other rehearsals were spent refining scenes and developing new ones. For example, on Friday, December 29, 1972, Salutin comments:

> I've got a last line. Talking with the actors about Canadian plays and what downers they are – always about losers. Yet what to do? Our past is negative. The country has remained a colony; the struggle in 1837 did not succeed. I've thought of changing the ending, having the rebels win (stop that Hanging!); or cutting off before the battle and the defeat, at, say, the high point in October '37. But finally we have to wrestle with what actually happened and wring something positive out of that. Losing, I argued, does not have to make you a "Loser"; there are winners who lose. It is the difference between saying, "We

lost," and saying, "No, we just haven't won yet." There it is. (qtd. Wasserman 197)

While Salutin's questioning of how to end the play indicates the group's attention to portraying the play's themes and issues, his comments from Monday, January 8, 1972, approximately one week before opening night, demonstrate the delicate nature of Thompson's collective creations while in development:

> Awful. Just awful. I can't say how bad. There is nothing there. And they will not work, will not give. The Family Compact is a horror; we haven't dared touch it in five days. Miles [Potter] is stumped on his Farmer's Travels. We all see what a good scene it is; we've seen him do it brilliantly; but he's clogged up, he makes excuses and accuses Paul of not directing him. Paul fires back that Miles won't commit himself. I stalk around the theatre – we moved in today out of the rehearsal room – wanting to rip Miles into bits for his stingy withholding. I know that's false, but it's what I feel. Paul and I confer hostilely, and they pick it up and sulk or fling back angry glares ... we are at a dead halt – no, we are careening backwards. There is no giving, no expansiveness – and no script to fall back on!
>
> Christ, I said to Paul, is it this way every time?

I don't know, he sighed. I can't remember. I guess so.

How do you stand it?

I must forget. If I remembered, I would never do it again. (qtd. Wasserman 199)

Thompson used the remaining rehearsals to piece the fragmented scenes into a unified whole that would communicate the play's story and theme. As Salutin explains the night before opening:

> We've put the Ventriloquism unit as the introduction to the meeting Mackenzie addresses before the rebellion. As a skit presented by two farmers for their friends at the rally. Agitprop of '37. Allows the other actors to react to it as *its* audience, drains off the heavy symbolism and clarifies that Clare is playing a real person who is *playing* a dummy.
>
> Great consternation about the newspaper scene with which we'd wanted to open. It is important for me 1) to open a play about Canadian history with a scene of class conflict, and 2) to show the centrality of Mackenzie's paper – its propaganda and education – for the movement. (qtd. Wasserman 200-201)

For Salutin, the rehearsal process consisted of generating enough theatrical material in order to piece the play together for presentation. Through the use of exercises, questions, and requests, Thompson had generated a number of scenes that he and Salutin sorted through,

finding the most provocative, interesting or significant for the production. As well, the rehearsal process served as a means for Thompson and Salutin to determine how to piece the play together with a beginning, middle and end, all linked with a theme and a purpose. Once the scenes were gathered and chosen, they were then put into an order that would communicate the story of the War of 1837, as well as the story of the play.

After six weeks of rehearsals, *1837* opened on January 17, 1973. On opening night, Salutin wrote:

> Two instructive things happened. When Clare (Coulter) started Act II with "Bay and Adelaide, the northwest corner," the audience laughed. If an actor said, "Montmartre, 4 a.m." or "Piccadilly Circus, twelve noon," no audience anywhere would laugh. But we are so imbued with self-denial, so colonized, that the very thought of something historic happening here, at Bay and Adelaide, draws laughs.
>
> Again, during the Battle, in the nighttime skirmish when both inexperienced sides broke ranks and fled, Miles lost his line for a moment, and the audience laughed. Miles – American Miles – said that moment made clear to him for the first time what I'd been saying about the problem of Canadian history for a Canadian audience. There was nothing funny about the

> moment. It was terrifying or it should have been. (qtd. Wasserman 201)

At the same time, Salutin records Janet Amos as having admitted that "the response to *1837* is different from any play she's ever appeared in. It's not just appreciation. It's something warmer." Salutin finally admitted that the response to *1837* is due to identification with what he calls "a meeting with ourselves" (Wasserman 201). In the play, Salutin's "meeting" is recognized; not only does the play provide an opportunity for Canadian audiences to experience their history in a theatrical setting, but it is also a way for Canadians to understand their present culture by learning about their past. As a result of this, three weeks after the first performance, the actors challenged themselves to deliver their lines so that the audience would not laugh at them. The audience's reaction identifies how Canadian subject matter interacts with its audience differently than non-Canadian subject matter - their unfamiliarity with having their own environment and culture discussed in a theatrical forum is apparent in the audience's laughter. Furthermore, it explains why Thompson chose to work in the collective creation genre: in order to tie theatre practice to the creation of Canadian dramatic text. This connection is the means by which the genre itself forges the larger link between local real-world communities, either historical or contemporary, and

the more universal Canadian community which can be referred to as the Canadian theatre audience.

More than a year later, although some scenes were kept from the original version, the play was reworked and restructured in three and a half weeks. The result amounted to a new play, entitled *1837: The Farmers' Revolt*, which opened in June 1974. *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* was developed in exactly the same way as the first version of the play, but was meant for a tour of farming communities instead of an urban theatre audience, and therefore, it differed from the earlier version. As a result of new work being added, *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* made use of two additional actors: Doris Cowan and Terry Tweed.

As a result of reworking the play, a realization occurred, that the play's Canadian content had to remain flexible in order to be adapted to a larger audience. For example, the first version of the play was developed by means of a more literary-focused process where the actual contents of Willian Lyon Mackenzie's newspaper were an essential ongoing element in the piece. The second act of the first version, *1837*, concentrated on the battle on Yonge Street. According to Thompson, the character of Mackenzie in the first version of the play "was a totally different character. We were trying to make him into a specific kind of character. He was less interesting because of

that and less capable in the piece.. In the first version, he was a leader and he was played out as being very heroic. Almost like an author."

In the second version, Mack kenzie was made more aggressive, "fighting for his political beliefs an d for his sense of history, which were very intermingled. He becam ne a particular radical." Ultimately, the character of Mackenzie convey ed "a brilliantly perceived underdog quality to his personality that (Mil les) Potter was able to grab onto and able to make shine." The lack of M Mackenzie's aggressiveness had been a problem that the acting participa ants of the collective creation had recognized. The need to clarify thi is quality in his character came from a realization by everyone involved t that a crucial element of the story was absent. During the play's first t run, the actors had noticed this missing element, and they began t to struggle with their characters, and ultimately, the entire piece. T o remedy this problem, in an act which demonstrates the collective n nature of both authorship and ownership in a collective creation, Thompson instructed the actors to conduct research once again in ord der to find what element of the play was missing, or what had remained d undiscovered during the initial research.

Another difference between *1837*, and *1837: The Farmers' Revolt*, is in the settings of the scenes. In the first version, the events

and locales were set strictly in Toronto. According to Salutin, for the second version, the cast "de-emphasized these [events and locales] in the country and looked for elements that reflected what had happened out there, where we were planning to tour the show" (Wasserman 201). In other words, the cast of *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* attempted to make the play more relevant to its touring audience by including additional information that pertained to the areas in which they were performing the piece, and not focus so intently on one city.

For instance, Anthony van Egmond, the old colonel who led the revolutionary force at Montgomery's Tavern became a more prominent figure. Instead of showing the entire four days of fighting around Toronto, they only showed the final battles there. They elaborated further on Van Egmond's involvement in the surrounding Ontario areas, portraying his first three days as he marched from his home into Toronto to take command of the forces there.

For Salutin, the biggest difference between *1837* and *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* is in the play's overall aesthetic. As he explains, "[*1837: The Farmers' Revolt*] became much tighter than the earlier version. In the first version, for example, we served the battle up whole. In the second, by concentrating on the experience of Van Egmond, we gave the scene a dramatic focus it had lacked. In the end, I would say version two ... is a far better play" (Wasserman 202).

In total, both versions were rehearsed for nine and a half weeks: the first version, for six weeks; the second version for three and a half weeks. For Thompson, the rehearsal process and the creation process of the text ended, as it should have, only when each participant was content with his or her character's story, as well as the story of the entire play:

> In *1837: The Farmers Revolt*, I kept thinking we could add new stuff into it. Parts of it worked, but the actors thought that they didn't want anything new added because it would take away from the effectiveness of what they had already put into it. They had great instincts. In a sense, the theatrical dynamic would tell you if it was working or not ... We would work out bits and develop things that weren't clear, but after a while, I had to disallow new material to be brought in because I would start to lose the immediacy that was maintained with the audience and that freshness. It's a judgment call, but you have to trust your instinct, the performers' and those of everyone involved.

With *The Farm Show* and *1837: The Farmers' Revolt*, Thompson identified specific Canadian subject matter and a specific Canadian audience. He was able to present material that was directly relevant to the Canadian audience he was serving, using either Canadian

history and/or local mythology. He addressed a need in the English-speaking theatre in Canada, enabling artists to add to the paucity of Canadian-written work that could speak clearly and intelligently to a Canadian audience. With these plays, Paul Thompson refined his method of working in collective creation as a means by which to connect theatre practice with the creation of dramatic text. He developed his skills in this genre of theatre, creating a style and form for which he would become nationally known.

From the time of his first collective creation at Theatre Passe Muraille, until his term as Artistic Director of the theatre company ended, Paul Thompson directed a total of twenty-seven collective creations. Thompson continues to direct in the genre: and his newest collective creation, *The Rediscovery of Sex*, will be performed at Theatre Passe Muraille in May 2000.

Other theatre companies, following Thompson's example, emerged from coast to coast to explore the genre of the collective creation in the style that Thompson had established. For example, in 1974, the Mummers Troupe of Newfoundland used this form of play development. Under the direction of Chris Brookes, the Mummers lived for eight weeks in a bunkhouse in the central Newfoundland mining town of Buchans, where they devised a collective creation titled *Buchans: A Mining Town*, a compilation of oral history and

folklore which incorporates the process of research into the performance text. The play was a breakthrough for the Newfoundland theatre community, "providing a new method of theatre that was exciting and relevant to the province because it came from the province" (Brooks 113).

Brooks cites Paul Thompson as an influence for this play, since it was Thompson's work in *The Farm Show* that fueled his initial interest to use this medium to explore Newfoundland's mining culture. As Brooks explains in an interview with Robert Wallace:

> Paul Thompson had a hit with *The Farm Show*. Everybody who was into collective creation was talking about it. And why shouldn't they? It was a perfect way to do theatre. A lot of it was material generated right from the horse's mouth. And if we wanted to write a play about a specific place, specific people and for a specific audience, why shouldn't we go out there, live with them, work with them and essentially *be* them for a while in order to make it as authentic as we can? Paul Thompson said, "Get out there and write plays for these audiences." And he proved himself over and over again. So that's what made me think that, in Newfoundland, we had hundreds if not thousands of stories to tell. Why not do it like Paul [Thompson] and do it in a collective form? (32)

Furthermore, in Edmonton, in 1977, David Barnet was working with students as a teacher of improvisational drama at the University of Alberta. Barnet began his exploration of the collective creation process while teaching at the Manitoba Theatre School in the late 1960s, discovering that theatre was an effective means to teach non-professional students "to act well, act with complete involvement, without teaching them technique" (Filewod 153). In Barnet's classes at the University of Alberta, students were required to research and perform a short collective creation. In 1977, one such group composed *Drinks Before Dinner*, a play Filewod describes as being "a cautionary tale about alcoholism ... [depicting] the problem of alcohol abuse through representative characters based on real models" (153). After Barnet's suggestion, the actors contacted the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (ADAAC) to inquire about a grant to subsidize a short tour of the play. ADAAC, after expressing its interest in the play, offered to sponsor a province-wide tour, funded by its Sponsored Projects Branch. Under the name of The Intimate Theatre of Alcohol Awareness, the students took the play to fifty-nine communities during the summer of 1977. The tour was a success; ADAAC commissioned a follow-up show, and other social agencies expressed interest in similar projects. It was on the basis of this success that Barnet founded the Catalyst Theatre Society that same

year. Subsequent productions included other works that supported Calayst's relationship with the audience for which it was created: *Stand Up for Your Rights* (1981), a piece commissioned by the Alberta Law Foundation and the Alberta Association for the Mentally Retarded as a vehicle to discuss the legal rights of the mentally handicapped; and *It's About Time* (1982-1983), a play that addressed issues of prison life.

Thompson's influence on Catalyst Theatre Society consisted primarily of encouragement to explore the genre of the collective creation. As Barnet explains:

> I already was aware of the collective creation before I was aware of Paul Thompson. George Luscombe was around years before Paul [Thomspon]. So did Thompson introduce the collective creation to me? No. But what he did do for me was introduce a way to do a collective creation. Prior to my experiences with Thompson, collective creations remained at a level that never really rose above a calibre of agitation propaganda, telling me "We're mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore." What Thompson did, primarily with *The Farm Show*, and I use *The Farm Show* as an example because it was celebrated as the way to do a collective creation, what he did in that instance was tell people that collective creations, and theatre in general, are

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connotations. Most important, it sought direct interaction with a Canadian version of an alternative audience. The major benefit of collective creation is that it is a form of theatre practice which by its very nature and normal functioning creates text that is both effective theatrically, and touches its audience on a deep and meaningful level. For a number of reasons, Canada had now been given the opportunity to develop its body of Canadian written work for its English-speaking theatre industry within the genre of collective creation.

Although many artists and companies contributed substantially to collective creation, I have narrowed my focus to Paul Thompson, not only because he produced a large body of work, including several highly regarded play texts, but also because he inspired more artists to continue in these directions. If we look at the work of some of those artists, it becomes apparent that the legacy of the collective creation movement in the Toronto theatre community has generated, and continues to generate, rich and vibrant Canadian pieces.

As presented in the introduction, the Canadian theatre industry established a need for theatre practice and creation of dramatic text to be connected. This need prompted Paul Thompson to work in collective creation to make this connection. In the following three chapters, I will explore Thompson's influence on others to work in new play development, to add to the body of work in Canada's

English-speaking theatre industry. I will discuss the careers of three representative individuals who were involved in the collective creation movement of the 1970s and early 1980s: Layne Coleman, Jo Ann McIntyre, and John Palmer. Each of these three artists worked with Paul in various collective creations at Theatre Passe Muraille and have gone on to explore different avenues of theatre. They continue to serve the Toronto audience that Thompson assisted in establishing, carrying with them the influences of collective creation and the approaches and techniques of Paul Thompson. I will analyze Layne Coleman's involvement in collective creations, to show how they fueled his interest in developing new work, and his current career as Artistic Director of Theatre Passe Muraille. I will establish that Jo Ann McIntyre's career in working with collective creation prepared her to fulfill her current position as a freelance dramaturg and director of new work. I will cite John Palmer's career in collective creations in order to explain his current style of playwriting and his interest in dramaturgy. As with Paul Thompson, the work of each of these people reflects their need in their work to regularly and systematically link theatre practice with the creation of dramatic text.

Chapter 2 – Layne Coleman

Layne Coleman's background in collective creations has made him a central player in the development of new work. After having been introduced to Paul Thompson and his method of collective creation, Coleman was provided with opportunities to acquire skills and techniques that enabled him to explore new play development as an actor, director, writer, and artistic director. Now a veteran performer in collective creations, Coleman continues to use elements of Thompson's philosophies and practices in his current position as Artistic Director of Theatre Passe Muraille. In this chapter, I will highlight Layne Coleman's involvement in the collective creation genre, with the intention of showing how this work prepared him for his many and various roles of actor, director, writer, and artistic director with a strong capability to do new works.

Born in Oxbow, Saskatchewan, Layne Coleman had his first professional involvement in theatre in Saskatoon at the 25th Street House Theatre, a company that opened in 1971, and became quite popular for their collective creations in the 1970s and early 1980s. Co-founded by University of Saskatchewan graduates, the 25th Street House Theatre began as a centre for art and theatre, but soon focused entirely on the latter. The company's first Artistic Director was also one of its co-founders, Andras Tahn. According to Tahn, the company

was intended to "raise the calibre and widen the scope of local and regional culture" (qtd. Bessai 218). From its beginning, 25th Street House Theatre, later called simply 25th Street Theatre, produced a series of Canadian plays, and by 1975, Coleman had established himself as an actor for 25th Street House Theatre. He was involved in such plays as Ken Campbell's *Pilk's Madhouse*, and the company's successful *The Ballad of Billy the Kid*, described in the theatre's archives as being a collective creation authored by Tahn.

In October of that year, Paul Thompson offered to direct a collective creation for the company in exchange for rehearsal space for *The West Show*. Tahn was excited about the possibilities of collective creation, and agreed to Thompson's proposal. For the show to be done at 25th Street Theatre, Thompson recruited members of the company's acting pool, which included Tahn himself, as well as Coleman, Bob Collins, Chris Covert, Linda Griffiths, and Karen Wiens. It was at this time that Coleman was introduced to Thompson's techniques of collective creation as the work was developed. Subsequently it was titled *Prairie Landscape; or If You're So Good Why Are you in Saskatoon?*.

For this show, Coleman is most noted for developing his character Lenny, a man who grows up in a small Saskatchewan town, and becomes disgruntled by the narrow-mindedness and suffocation

he experiences there. Lenny then moves to Saskatoon, in search of greater opportunities for his life and career. As he did with *The Farm Show*, Thompson asked that the research for the development of this piece to be as truthful and honest as possible, in order to make it a true depiction of Canadian culture. In keeping with this authenticity, Coleman approached the role by basing it on his own life: having been born in small-town Saskatchewan in 1950, Coleman felt the need to move to Saskatoon in 1967 to find an effective outlet for his creative energies and interests.

With *Prairie Landscapes; or If You're So Good Why Are You In Saskatoon?*, Coleman was intrigued by the opportunity to draw heavily on his own personal experiences in order to develop the character and the piece itself. Although Coleman had previously worked in the collective creation genre with *The Ballad of Billy the Kid*, he accounts this experience as being:

> ...an experience in story telling. We took real-life characters and made a play about them. That's one thing. With *Prairie Landscapes; or If You're So Good Why Are You In Saskatoon?*, we took our own characters, our own stories, our own experiences and made a play about them. It was invigorating. It was something I had never thought of before. And why

couldn't I have done something like that? (Personal Interview, May 7, 1999)

With *Prairie Landscape; or If You're So Good Why Are You In Saskatoon?*, Coleman had learned what was necessary to develop a Canadian play. Prior to this experience, Coleman's acting work had been conventional; as he explains:

> It was superficial. I would get a play, rehearse the play, perform the play, and the audience would either appreciate it, or not. Most of the time, they would not. And our box office reflected that. The 25th Street Theatre, in its first three years, was in financial trouble. We had one success with *The Ballad of Billy the Kid*, maybe two, in the first three years of the theatre's life.

When asked why there was such financial trouble at 25th Street Theatre, Coleman attributed it to this routine method of play creation the theatre company had done prior to *Prairie Landscape; or If You're So Good Why Are You In Saskatoon?*. However, when Paul Thompson worked with the company in the style of collective creation, the company felt refreshed and invigorated after engaging in this unique genre of theatre. The result was positive, as *Prairie Landscape; or If You're So Good Why Are You In Saskatoon?* had become the largest box office success of the first five years of the theatre company. The success of the play indicates the actors' interest in the subject-matter,

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a model for various Canadian theatre companies. The collective creations done at 25th Street House Theatre following *Prairie Landscapes; or If You're So Good Why Are You In Saskatoon?* were modelled after Thompson's example, and provided the company with the opportunity to explore Canadian subject matter and, more specifically, the culture of Saskatoon, with greater authenticity.

Through his involvement in collective creations at 25th Street Theatre that followed *Prairie Landscapes; or If You're So Good Why Are You In Saskatoon?*, Coleman continually developed his craft, not only as a Canadian theatre artist, but also as an individual responsible for creating quality theatre for a Canadian audience. The collective creations that followed at 25th Street Theatre, while not always resounding box-office successes, continually approached authentic Canadian subject matter by presenting the actors' experiences. The company continued a fidelity and faithfulness towards its audience by presenting such genuine material, and, "for that," Coleman says, "25th Street Theatre owes a lot to Paul Thompson."

25th Street Theatre's introduction to Thompson's method of developing a collective creation created new possibilities for the exploration of the theatre company's regional culture. In fact, 25th Street Theatre was so interested in pursuing and exploring the

collective creation genre after *Prairie Landscapes; or If You're So Good Why Are You In Saskatoon?* that Tahn decided to follow the production with another collective creation, to be performed in January of 1976. Directed by Don Rutley and entitled *The Unicorn*, it was based on the novel *The Last Unicorn* by Peter S. Beagle.

In 1976, while Coleman continued to perform at 25th Street Theatre in more structured and traditional plays, such as *Hermit* by Michael Dorn Wiss, most of the work done by the theatre company were collective creations. *If You're So Good Why Are You in Saskatoon?* was brought back in September of that year, and Coleman contributed to such collective creations at 25th Street Theatre as *Heartbreak Hotel*, performed from October to November, 1976, and *The Sacred Mountain*, performed from December, 1976 to January, 1977.

Also, in 1976, Coleman decided to move to Toronto, not only to explore further the collective creation genre, but also to examine the theatre company and audience Paul Thompson had become so renowned for establishing. Coleman rekindled his relationship with Paul Thompson by appearing in various productions at Theatre Passe Muraille. While Coleman worked in *Star*, written and directed by Paul Kelman, from May to June of that year, he also participated in *The Olympics Show*, a collective creation directed by Paul Thompson with

the collaboration of Bruce Kidd. By 1977, Coleman had established himself as an actor in both Saskatoon and Toronto, demonstrating his strength in the collective creation genre, as well as collective creation's pervasive presence in Canada. That year, Coleman continued to work at Theatre Passe Muraille, involving himself in such productions as *Far As The Eye Can See*, a collective creation written by Rudy Wiebe and Theatre Passe Muraille, directed by Paul Thompson, and co-produced by Tarragon Theatre and Theatre Passe Muraille.

While Coleman was able to learn from Thompson by working with him in *Prairie Landscapes; or If You're So Good Why Are You In Saskatoon?*, it was especially inspiring to work directly with Thompson in his element, Theatre Passe Muraille, and seeing the Toronto following that Thompson had developed. For Coleman, working with Paul Thompson was like "watching a master doing what he does best. One can't help but walk away learning something, saying, 'I want to do what he does and how he does it'."

During the summer of 1977, Coleman turned his attention towards the development of new work at the Blyth Summer Festival in Blyth, Ontario. Contributing solely as an actor that season, Coleman worked on such plays as *A Summer Burning*, by Harry J. Boyle, *The Blood is Strong* by Lister Sinclair, *The Blyth Memorial History Show* by

Jim Schaefer, and *The Shortest Distance Between Two Points* by Keith Roulston.

Coleman's involvement at Blyth served an important purpose in his career. Having had experience in developing work through his participation in various collective creations, Coleman was now prepared to assist other playwrights and directors. The Blyth Summer Festival provided him with a perfect outlet. Following a path that started with collective creation, Coleman became very involved in examining new scripts from across the country, since this work was part of the national mandate at Blyth. The collective creation genre had provided Canada's English-speaking theatre industry with a tremendous body of work based on Canadian subject matter. For Coleman, it was and it remains a natural progression for him to follow that interest, and to develop works from other writers across the country who were also addressing their own concerns and topics at the Blyth Summer Festival. As Coleman explains:

> With the collective creations, I learned a lot. I learned how to structure a play. I learned how to develop a play, and how to make a play because that's the nature of the beast. It's a very different theatre experience than taking an already existing text and rehearsing it day after day. Collective creations are more visceral than that. So with the collective creations, I learned

techniques and exercises to help me develop a character further. I learned how to question a character further and question a scene's inclusion in a play's overall structure. When I was working with Paul [Thompson], once we had enough material, we were constantly battling over which scenes to include, which ones not to include, the order they go in, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. When I worked on new play at Blyth and after Blyth, I could talk about structure in that sense, because that's all that a collective creation was about: developing structure.

Furthermore, Blyth provided Coleman with an opportunity to develop new work from differing stages in the play's development. At 25th Street Theatre, the new work was primarily local, written by Saskatchewan writers. In fact, several of the plays that 25th Street Theatre produced were written by Andras Tahn, showing that the company was more concerned with developing and using its own members than outsiders. With the Blyth Summer Festival, Coleman had an opportunity to follow work with plays and artists from across the country, an opportunity he had never experienced in Saskatoon. For Coleman, whose confidence in Canadian work and its development had already been established in many plays, both of a

conventional and a collective creation genre, to develop new Canadian work by single authors was a natural progression.

From March to May 1978, Coleman returned to 25th Street Theatre, participating in its collective creation *Generation and ½*. Directed by Guy Sprung, with a cast consisting of Coleman, Bob Bainborough, Sharon Bakker, David Francis, Linda Griffiths, Connie Kaldor and Bill Prokopchuk, *Generation and ½* was a sequel to the theatre company's highly successful collective creation *Paper Wheat* (1977). Then, from September to November of that year, Coleman worked in Edmonton, acting as a participant in the collective creation *Hard Hats and Stolen Hearts* at Theatre Network.

In March of 1979, Coleman began to explore other avenues in theatre. Having experience as an actor and as a participant in collective creations, Coleman further developed his talents with *The Queen's Cowboy*, performed at 25th Street Theatre. Written by Coleman along with William Hominuke, *The Queen's Cowboy* marked a new path in Coleman's career – an opportunity for the collective creation alumnus to showcase his talents in developing new work by developing one of his own. Writing, again, came as a natural progression for Coleman. After having developed scenes and characters in the various collective creations in which he participated, as well as working on new Canadian plays at Blyth Summer Festival,

Theatre Passe Muraille and 25th Street Theatre, Coleman had acquired a tremendous background to justify his involvement in the creation and development of new work. As Coleman explains:

> The collective creations of Paul Thompson gave me experiences and opportunities that I never knew existed before. I was writing, directing, creating. And it was fantastic. I was no longer just an actor. I was a creator. I was an artist. I could get right into theatre. The collective creations gave me the encouragement to pursue other areas of theatre, as well as the expertise to hone those skills. If I wrote a scene in a collective creation, it would be ripped apart, analyzed, cross-analyzed, turned upside-down, the whole thing. From that, I learned to think really carefully about writers, writing, and what goes down on paper. I learned how to write and I learned how to look at writing with a more distinct set of eyes.

In April of 1979, Coleman returned to Theatre Passe Muraille, acting in the revival of *The Farm Show* with Linda Griffiths, John Jarvis, Ted Johns and Mary Walsh. In the summer of that year, Coleman also returned to the Blyth Summer Festival, acting in new work such as *McGillicuddy's Lost Weekend* by Keith Roulston. Finally, Coleman reunited with Paul Thompson, who directed for

Blyth that summer the Theatre Passe Muraille collective creation titled *The Death of the Donnellys*.

In 1980, Coleman's career and the direction of 25th Street Theatre took a serious turn when Coleman was appointed interim Artistic Director of the theatre company while Andy Tahn was on a sabbatical year. After his previous profound involvement in new work at the Blyth Summer Festival, Coleman took a strong initiative towards refining the mandate of the 25th Street Theatre – the presentation of new work – by encouraging the submission of new scripts by single authors, not collective creations. Even collective creations were developed more by a single playwright rather than the acting company. Such a direction took place, according to Coleman, because, "I wasn't interested in pursuing the collective creation anymore. I had done it. I was successful at it. And that was all. The collective creation was really a jumping-off point for me and not one that I wanted to stay fixed to for the remainder of my career." Coleman had been given and had further developed his skills and techniques to practice new play development, and he wished to continue improving these skills.

Plays included in the company's seasons from 1980-81 included Coleman's own *Queen's Cowboy*, Ruth Smillie's *Sisters*, Marc

Diamond's *The Ziggy Effect*, Jim Garrard's *Cold Comfort*, and Don Wise's *Rodeo*.

Away from 25th Street Theatre, Coleman continued to shift his focus from the collective creation genre, acting in theatre productions of a conventional, traditional nature such as Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* at Theatre London, directed by Keith Batten. Even at Theatre Passe Muraille, Coleman's only involvement in this year was not as a participant in a collective creation, but as an actor in Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*, directed by Paul Thompson. Coleman's attention turned from collective creation because he wanted to show his talents in a range of genres in Canadian theatre. In order to show his versatility as an artist in theatre, there was no need to stay restricted to the collective creation model.

In the following years, Layne Coleman's attention turned significantly toward the development of new work by a single author, toward strengthening the craft of solo-authored texts, and sharply away from the genre of the collective creation. However, all was not forgotten from the latter. The various collective creations on which he worked taught him to "emphasize Canadian content in what was being presented, and this in turn assisted me in developing well-written Canadian plays." As well, his dedication to developing new Canadian work carried over from his involvement in the collective

creations of the 1970s and early 1980s. For example, at Theatre Network in April of 1981, Coleman directed E.H. Carefoot's *Rumplestilzkin Busts Out.* Coleman also continued to work at the Blyth Festival, directing such new works as *Down North* by Janet Amos (1982), *The Green Dolphin* by M.T. Kelly (1982) and *Cakewalk* by Colleen Curran (1985 and 1986). His own *Blue City* was also produced at the festival in 1983. As well, Coleman's involvement at Theatre Passe Muraille as an actor included working on such shows as *O.D. On Paradise* by Patrick Brymer and Linda Griffiths (1982 and 1984), *The Passe Muraille Hamlet* (1983), as well as Ann-Marie MacDonald and Beverly Cooper's *Nancy Drew: Clue In The Fast Lane* (1985). As a writer, his *Blue City Slammers* was produced at Theatre Passe Muraille in 1985, which he himself directed, and his play *The Gospel Hour* was produced at 25th Street Theatre in 1986. As an Artistic Director, Coleman followed his interim Artistic Directorship at 25th Street Theatre by resuming the position in 1981. He then shared this position with Andras Tahn and Linda Griffiths from 1981 to 1983, after which Coleman left the theatre company.

In 1991, Coleman's career took another interesting turn when he was appointed to the position of interim Artistic Director of Theatre Passe Muraille, following Brian Richmond, who had left the company in financial trouble. A year later, Coleman left Theatre Passe Muraille

and continued to direct and act in various productions across Toronto. However, in 1998, Coleman resumed his position as Artistic Director of Theatre Passe Muraille, after Susan Serran was fired by the company's board of directors. In the company's first season under his Artistic Directorship, Theatre Passe Muraille produced such new plays as Gavin Sutter's *Stuck*, Elynne Terrence's *My Blue Eyes* and Diane Flacks' *Up*.

Currently, Coleman practices what he learned from participating in collective creations as he fulfills his duties as Artistic Director at Theatre Passe Muraille. While the company has over the years decreased the number of collective creations for which it had developed a reputation in the 1970s and early 1980s, Coleman still acknowledges an influence from those collective creations: the centrality and importance of the audience. As Coleman explains:

> We are putting plays on for an audience. We do it for ourselves as well. There is a selfishness involved in what we do as theatre artists and practitioners, but if there's no audience for us to do it in front of, then our job is pointless. We have to have an audience. As such, we have to have plays that speak to that audience. What the collective creations did for me was show me how to make, how to identify, how to help establish that connection between what is being presented on stage and the

> audience. Without the audience, we're nothing. The collective creations not only taught me how to develop that relationship so that the audience becomes engaged in what is going on, but they also taught the audience how to become involved. I think the collective creations were the first plays that established drama that was actually for someone other than the actors and artists involved.

As well, Coleman is aware of the company's dedication to presenting Canadian subject matter on stage, and its mission to develop Canadian writers. By having worked with Paul Thompson at Theatre Passe Muraille in the past, Coleman feels a sense of responsibility to continue the path that Thompson had established with the theatre company with the many collective creations he created there. Coleman ensures that the plays he chooses will reach the audience of Theatre Passe Muraille and ultimately the rest of Canada. Coleman is continuing a tradition of a theatre company that for thirty-one years has furthered the development of Canadian work, Canadian theatre and its audience. Coleman's focus during the past twenty years on developing a body of Canadian-written material with a strong sense of regional identity that will speak to Canadian audiences shows that the legacy of collective creation remains a strong feature of his work.

However, Coleman was not the only person to emerge from the collective creation movement of the 1970s and early 1980s, and from the influence of Paul Thompson, with a sense of responsibility to developing new Canadian work. Many of Coleman's contemporaries who are alumni of Theatre Passe Muraille's collective creations are also involved in new play development. One of them is Janet Amos, who just ended her second term as Artistic Director of Blyth Summer Festival. While Coleman continues as an Artistic Director with the philosophy of collective creation, other artists have also developed skills and practices from collective creation that have assisted them in their current work. I have chosen to discuss Jo Ann McIntyre, because her career continues to demonstrate obvious influences from collective creation in an area away from Artistic Directorship, thereby showing that the influence of Paul Thompson's collective creations is pervasive and deep. Jo Ann McIntyre graduated from the collective creations at Theatre Passe Muraille to become a company dramaturg and dramaturg/director of new work.

Chapter 3 – Jo Ann McIntyre

I am profiling Jo Ann McIntyre because not only is she another artist who currently works in the production of new work, but she also acquired several of her skills from the collective creations directed by Paul Thompson at Theatre Passe Muraille in which she was involved during the 1970s and early 1980s. She is an example of one of the successful female artists whose original training as an actor helped to springboard her into the multi-faceted skills required of participants in collective creations. I also stress her interaction with other artists to show how their group involvement helped to produce better work. In this chapter, I explore McIntyre's career, demonstrating how her experiences in the various collective creations during the 1970s and early 1980s prepared her for her present position of freelance dramaturg.

Jo Ann McIntyre graduated in 1974 from the BFA Acting Program at the University of Alberta. Her first professional theatre experience was in *You're Not So Great*, performed by the Company of Companies in Toronto, written and directed by Lois Chernoil, a friend of McIntyre. Running for only one week in September, 1974, *You're Not So Great* was performed in a small space seating approximately thirty people. Paul Thompson, who had by this time become a regular audience member at unconventional, small and unpopular theatre

venues, and intrigued by the company's determination to produce new, original work, went to see *You're Not So Great*. The reviews of the play were not favourable. *Toronto Star* reviewer Urjo Kareda remarked on the play's "inability to interest let alone engage the audience" (September 7, 1975, C3). However, Thompson was most impressed with the performance of the young McIntyre, who demonstrated to Thompson not only her skill as an actress, but also her interest in developing Canadian plays written away from the mainstream. As Thompson explains:

> In [*You're Not So Great*], Jo Ann was a great performer. She was very captivating on stage. I was quite impressed by the talent of such a young actress. I was also aware of her involvement in the theatre company. I had been aware of Company of Companies' desire to put up new work. Its desire to put up their own work. It was just this small, little company that wanted to produce plays. Canadian plays. It was an invigorating company. And watching Jo Ann be a part of that was exciting for me. (Personal Interview, June 17, 1998)

After Thompson had recognized this potential in McIntyre, he made a point of remembering her for any upcoming projects for which she might be available to perform. The following November, Thompson asked McIntyre to perform in a collective creation based on

an idea inspired by Moses Znaimer, executive producer of CityTV. Broadcasting out of Toronto, Znaimer was at the time showing "Blue Movies" on his television station, for which censors were threatening to revoke his broadcasting license. When Znaimer approached Thompson with the issue of censorship as a topic of a possible play, Thompson was interested, wishing to pursue the subject as a collective creation. After Thompson asked McIntyre to assist in the project, she accepted, joining a cast consisting of Howie Cooper, Paul Kelman, Diana Knight, Elizabeth Murphy, Michael Northcott, Andy Thomson, Terry Schonblum and Abigail Wright. Later titled *I Love You, Baby Blue*, this collective creation became one of Theatre Passe Muraille's most famous and controversial productions.

McIntyre began working on this collective creation in December, 1974, as she and the other participating members began researching the sex industry in Toronto under Thompson's direction. Once enough research for the piece was conducted, the cast then began developing scenes. During this part of the rehearsal process, McIntyre felt most comfortable bringing in written material she had composed in private. McIntyre was intimidated by the improvisational abilities of actors such as Howie Cooper and Elizabeth Murphy. Therefore, she felt that her contribution to the piece as a writer of her own scenes

and as an actor in those of others made her more valuable to the development of the piece than being an improviser.

One scene that McIntyre had written, which was included in the final production of the piece, became one of the most controversial scenes in the play. The scene was inspired by an interview she conducted with a Toronto prostitute. In the interview, the prostitute had commented on how her profession requires her to simulate pleasure and appear to enjoy being raped. McIntyre then wrote a scene in which two men rape a woman who finds herself increasingly more aroused as the scene continues. McIntyre describes her process throughout *I Love You, Baby Blue*:

> I would research something in the sex industry: massage parlours, prostitutes, bath houses, park sex, fantasies, pornography, anything. Eventually, I would just let my imagination get the better of me and I would write these scenes. Because of the subject matter, it was much easier for me to write my scenes and do my work in the privacy of my own home than to get up and do it in front of everybody else. (Personal Interview, August 10, 1998)

After opening in January of 1975, *I Love You, Baby Blue* itself quickly became a censorship issue. The Censorship Bureau of Toronto was quick to identify three problems they wished to

investigate in the play. The first controversy arose out of a scene in which a switchblade was used. Because switchblades were illegal weapons at the time, members from the Censorship Bureau viewed the production in order to determine the scene's artistic value. Once the presence of the switchblade was approved, the censors then became worried about the amount of sex contained in the show. By this time, word of the play's sexual activities, and the censorship issues involved, had hit the newspapers, and the play became a box-office success. Once the censors had determined that the sex acts in the play served an artistic purpose, the rape scene that McIntyre had written was then targeted for its content. It was only after the censors' third visit to *I Love You, Baby Blue* that the play was forced to close, ending an unprecedented three-and-a-half-month run. However, by this time, Theatre Passe Muraille had made so much money from the production that the theatre company was able to purchase the building in which it was performed, and this remains the home of Theatre Passe Muraille today. As well, at a time when actors in Toronto were earning, on average, fifty to one hundred fifty dollars a week, McIntyre and her co-participants in *I Love You, Baby Blue* were earning close to eight hundred dollars a week, a payment that indicates the popularity and success of this collective creation. With her first involvement in this style of theatre, McIntyre had

established herself as a valuable participant in the collective creation genre.

For McIntyre, this experience became an eye-opener. As she explains, "I was very protected as an actress in theatre school. I did my exercises and I got a lot out of what I was doing. But I don't think anything could have prepared me for this experience". By this, McIntyre is referring not only to the play's controversy, but also to the ability of the collective creation genre to create opportunities to explore several aspects of theatre. She was challenged by the invitation provided by collective creation to try her hand at writing and directing, as well as acting. As she explains, "I was able to do so much. I was able to do more than act. I was able to create. I was able to get into other areas than acting. I could direct a scene, create a scene, get involved of every aspect of theatre right from the very nitty gritty of it all." Jo Ann McIntyre left the experience of *I Love You, Baby Blue* with the realization that she could now explore other facets of theatre:

> Never before had I been asked to do everything. Acting is one thing, and that's one craft that I have been trained in. Many theatre companies in the country have you function as an actor, and that's it. Before *I Love You, Baby Blue*, I knew nothing about directing or writing, or research, or anything like that.

> What's exciting about the collective creation process, and what I value about having *I Love You, Baby Blue* as being my first experience in the collective creation genre, is that you don't just act. You write, direct, act, research, everything. The collective creation opened many doors to me and I am very thankful to have had that experience as one of my first. I would hate to think of how much I would have been deprived if the collective creation experience came to me later in my career and not right at the very beginning. It's a very rare person who can perform in a collective creation and I think I'm fortunate to be one of them. (Personal Interview, August 10, 1998)

With *I Love You, Baby Blue*, McIntyre also acquired a taste for directing. Following this production, McIntyre directed her own collective creation, *Inside Looking In*. Performed at Toronto's Redlight Theatre in December, 1975, *Inside Looking In* had a cast consisting of Francine Volker, Wendy Meldrum and Frank Moore. When asked why she turned her attention away from acting to such an extent, McIntyre replied:

> Acting seemed so dead-end for me. Unless I was doing a collective creation, I didn't maintain much virtuosity in the piece. I didn't have an opportunity to explore my limits and my interests to the extent that I wanted them to be explored. The

> collective creations were an opportunity for me to learn other trades in the industry. Once I had those experiences, I couldn't deny them.

The idea for *Inside Looking In* came to McIntyre while she was working on *I Love You, Baby Blue*. Interested in the issue of sex as a catalyst for control that was presented in *I Love You, Baby Blue*, McIntyre wanted to explore further the notion of power and control by means of a collective creation. She chose to approach *Inside Looking In* as a collective creation because the nature of the genre would maintain immediacy in the subject-matter with her co-creators, and enable her to provide the piece with a greater creative input. As she explains:

> I could write the piece and have actors perform it, but that isn't interesting. I know, because I've done it. It is much more relevant and interesting to have actors research the material and develop the material themselves. They have a greater connection to it. They have a greater interest in it. They become more invested and the piece becomes more meaningful to everyone that way.

While she didn't want the piece to have the "obtuse popularity", as she calls it, of *I Love You, Baby Blue*, McIntyre did want to maintain an element of truth in the subject matter with her co-creators on

Inside Looking In. Through the collective creation genre, McIntyre could ensure this truth, as all that was presented consisted of experiences that the actors themselves had had. The product became a play in which the action follows the events of an evening in which a woman holds a couple hostage. Throughout the course of the evening, they are forced to reveal their own personal secrets, which they realize have been holding them prisoners, much like the literal hostage situation.

With *Inside Looking In*, McIntyre had established herself as a strong director in the collective creation genre. Urjo Kareda described the piece as "Bold, daring, refreshing and intelligent" (*Toronto Star*, Dec. 18, 1975, D3). Likewise, Herbert Whittaker remarked on the play's "ability to make the audience grab hold and be just as fearful as the two characters held hostage ... a triumph for McIntyre in this, her first directing achievement" (*The Globe and Mail*, Dec. 18, 1975, C4).

Throughout the remaining years of the 1970s, McIntyre's experiences in theatre were primarily in various collective creations in Toronto. From February to April of 1976, McIntyre participated in Theatre Passe Muraille's collective creation *The Horsburgh Scandal*, written by Betty Jane Wylie, directed by Paul Thompson; *Star*, written and directed by Paul Kelman; and the collective creation *The Olympic Show* (the latter two with Layne Coleman). As well, in April of 1977,

McIntyre participated in *Disasterland* at Homemade Theatre, a collective creation composed by the company and Jed MacKay.

In September 1977, like Layne Coleman, McIntyre demonstrated an interest in writing. McIntyre's one-woman show *Brush-Off* was produced by Homemade Theatre, directed by Phil Savath, and performed at the Tarragon Theatre and at Centre Stage. For McIntyre, writing was a natural progression from her previous work. She had been writing throughout the previous collective creations, as her approach to each project was to write scenes on her own. While she felt a sense of accomplishment in this area by writing various scenes for *I Love You, Baby Blue*, she also attributes her directing experience in *Inside Looking In* as being a catalyst for her writing. As with Paul Thompson's approach, the cast for *Inside Looking In* would produce various scenes, which McIntyre would then filter, choosing the best for the final production. Once the scenes were chosen, McIntyre would give the scenes an order, providing the piece with its overall structure. McIntyre's experience in directing this project assisted her in writing *Brush-Off*, because it enabled her to assemble a piece: "Directing a collective creation is a lot like writing. I was given the ingredients and I had to find the right structure to serve the piece. Essentially a writer does the same thing. Both roles require the person to play jig-saw puzzle with the material."

In addition, McIntyre admits that she needed to be prepared for the act of writing a play before attempting a project as ambitions as *Brush-Off*. While she admires people who can "jump from acting to writing and back again", such as Judith Thompson and Ann-Marie MacDonald, both trained as an actors at the National Theatre School, McIntyre needed to be "shown the ropes of writing". To McIntyre's credit, *Brush-Off* was such a success that the show was produced at Theatre Passe Muraille the following year, in November 1978.

Throughout the remainder of the 1970s, McIntyre continued to perform in various collective creations at Theatre Passe Muraille. However, a turning-point in her career came in 1980, when she auditioned to assist a then-up-and-coming playwright with her first play: the playwright was Judith Thompson, and the play was *Crackwalker*. At first, McIntyre was unsure as to whether or not she herself would be an appropriate choice for the development of this new work, as her experiences had been restricted to collective creations, as well as a one one-woman show. However, Judith Thompson believed that McIntyre had demonstrated in various productions at Theatre Passe Muraille skills as an actress and creator that would fuel the character, Theresa, to the best of its potential. McIntyre accepted the role, and *Crackwalker* opened at Theatre Passe Muraille in November of 1980, directed by Clarke Rogers.

As Clarke Rogers explains in *The Development of Judith Thompson* by Nina Thoren:

> For the development of *Crackwalker*, Judith [Thompson] and I both were very cautious about who would be involved in its development and where the development would take place. We were very fortunate to have done it at Theatre Passe Muraille, where the contribution to theatre and Canadian art had been so substantial ... Jo Ann McIntyre provided a strong force for the lead character. We needed someone who had experience in several areas of theatre and staging, not just acting, because we didn't want a narrow focus. The person who could play Theresa had to do it all. And Jo Ann was it. (59)

Had it not been for McIntyre's experiences in the collective creations, she would not have been given the chance to assist in, nor to bring so much experience to, the development of Theresa, who has subsequently become one of Judith Thompson's most famous female characters. Creating Theresa was still partly a collective creation experience; according to McIntyre:

> When I created the role of Theresa, I was really using all the skills that I had acquired while working in collective creations. I had to think about this woman inside and out, but not only that, I had to think about her involvement in the structure of

> the play as a whole. I had to think of why this woman was so important, not just as a person, but as an element of a play, a very complicated play for that matter. All of those questions that I came up with were part and parcel of what I had acquired in the collective creations. In the collective creations, I learned not to put something in if it's superfluous or if it doesn't make sense or if it's just plain wrong. So when I approached the role of Theresa, it more or less became ingrained in my head to make sure that not one word she spoke and not one action she made was wasted, just like what we tried to do in the collectives.

As testament to the development of the play, including McIntyre's contribution, *Crackwalker* was selected in 1988 to be one of the plays chosen for Thompson's anthology *The Other Side Of The Dark*, which won the Governor General's Award for Dramatic Literature that year.

With experience in new play development and for her acclaimed performance in assisting in the creation of the role of Theresa in *Crackwalker*, Jo Ann McIntyre turned her attention towards dramaturgy. Following her performance in *Crackwalker*, and for the next fifteen years, McIntyre would be the company dramaturg for such theatres in Toronto as Factory Theatre Lab, Theatre Passe

Muraille, Buddies In Bad Times, Augusta Theatre Workshops, and Nightwood Theatre. In addition, McIntyre began directing new plays such as Lois Angley's *My One Wish* (1986) and Thomas Wilson's *Don't Push Me* (1990) at the Blyth Summer Festival.

In addition to skills, McIntyre adopted the philosophy of Theatre Passe Muraille that she learned through the collective creations she performed there:

> Theatre Passe Muraille, right from the beginning, was about creating theatre and creating audiences. Theatre Passe Muraille was about developing a Canadian quality in the theatre industry when there was no Canadian content, let alone quality. By contributing to that philosophy, by ensuring that Canadian theatre maintained a longevity and was consistent with substance relevant to a Canadian audience, how can I help but not continue that philosophy? I have developed it. I have to carry it through.

Currently, McIntyre continues to explore the collective creation genre as the director of a music-driven collective creation titled *She Promised To Bake A Pie* (1998). Co-created with Evelyn Prue, Janet Thames, Seldie Kurk and Tabatha Greene, *She Promised To Bake A Pie* explores the role of women in contemporary society. Moreover, McIntyre maintains her involvement in new work as a freelance

dramaturg. She assisted in the development of Fab Fillipo's one-man show, *Who Whats Where*, as a director/dramaturg, in addition to acting as a director/dramaturg for *White/Noise/Jump*, a piece composed by Fillipo, Mark Lonergan and Karen Lachoucse for their company Pinstripe Theatre. This achievement is a direct growth out of collective creation. Since she was able to participate in so many areas of theatre that included acting, writing and directing during her work in the collective creations of the 1970s and early 1980s, McIntyre is now able to assist other people to help them achieve the calibre that she has maintained in her own work.

McIntyre continues to carry the philosophy of Theatre Passe Muraille through her dedication to the production of new work. Like McIntyre, other artists continue to demonstrate influences from Theatre Passe Muraille and the collective creation genre. While McIntyre exemplifies these influences in her career as a dramaturg, some of her contemporaries have changed their style completely because of their experience in the collective creation genre. One such person is John Palmer, an artist who assisted McIntyre as a director and co-developer in her re-staging of *Brush-Off* at Theatre Passe Muraille in 1978. John Palmer's style of playwriting changed as a result of his influence from collective creation, which ultimately led him to his current position of company dramaturg.

Chapter 4 – John Palmer

John Palmer's career in new play development as company dramaturg for Factory Theatre can be traced back to the collective creation movement of the 1970s and early 1980s in English-speaking Canadian theatre, and definite influences from that movement can be identified. However, Palmer's career possesses specific contrasts to those of Layne Coleman and Jo Ann McIntyre. Most notably, Palmer's playwriting, which had started prior to his work in the collective creation genre, in fact changed as a result of his work in the genre. In this chapter, I explore Palmer's career, focusing on the collective creations on which he worked. I demonstrate how these collective creations, as well as Paul Thompson's ideology of Canadian theatre as practiced in collective creation, have influenced Palmer's style of playwriting and his current position as company dramaturg of Factory theatre.

John Palmer has always been dedicated to the development and production of new work. While studying English at Carleton University during the mid-1960s, Palmer began his professional theatre career by directing new work. He began staging his own new work in 1966 at his Le Hibou Theatre Company in Ottawa's Le Hibou Coffee House. The theatre company gathered a very small audience, but Palmer was intent to get his plays in front of anyone who wished

to watch them. After winning prizes in the Canadian University Drama League Playwriting Competition in both 1965 and 1966, Palmer moved to Stratford in 1967, where he changed the name of Le Hibou Theatre Company to The New Vic. At The New Vic, Palmer continued to write and direct new work, as well as to stage such classics as *Woyzeck*, *The Seagull*, and *The Tempest*.

In 1967, Palmer was accepted to apprentice with the Glasgow's Citizen's Theatre for its 1967-68 season. Palmer admits that, while he did not learn many staging techniques in Scotland to assist him with directing, he did return to Canada with the desire to produce Canadian theatre with the same dedication and passion that Glasgow's Citizen's Theatre produced Scottish theatre. As Palmer states:

> In Scotland, they were doing their own work. They were doing their own plays. Scottish plays for Scottish audiences. It made perfect sense. When I was working in that environment, surrounded by art made for and by the people of Scotland, I realized a very important thing. I was unable to make a name for myself in Canada because I had the wrong accent. All the time, plays were brought over from other countries, set in other countries, and actors and directors had to contend with that. We had to be true to the setting of the play, put on an accent

> that wasn't Canadian, and put the play up. When I was in Scotland, I had this realization, and I realized that this was wrong. (Personal Interview, July 7, 1998)

Upon returning to Canada in 1968 with this determination to expand the body of Canadian dramatic literature, Palmer became the director of Woodstock Little Theatre. *Tango*, a play Palmer wrote while in Scotland, was judged best of the 1969 Ontario Regional Festivals, and was chosen to represent Ontario in the Dominion Drama Festival's national competition in Kelowna, B.C. However, probably the most significant event to take place in Palmer's career at this time was the premiere production of his play *Memories For My Brother* at Stratford's Canadian Place Theatre. Palmer co-founded this theatre company with schoolmate Martin Kinch that same year in a dry-goods-store venue as an alternative to the mainstream productions found at the nearby Stratford Festival.

Canadian Place Theatre, as had Company of Companies, attracted the attention of Paul Thompson, who was interested in the company's dedication to new work. Thompson became aware of Palmer while working as an assistant director at the Stratford Festival. After seeing Palmer's work at the New Vic and Canadian Place Theatre, Thompson encouraged Jim Garrard to produce Palmer's *Memories For My Brother* at Theatre Passe Muraille. Garrard

accepted the play as part of its season, and *Memories For My Brother* was staged in December 1968.

After having been introduced to Toronto and to Theatre Passe Muraille, Palmer moved to Toronto permanently. Sharing Thompson's dedication to the development and production of new Canadian work, Palmer became associate director of Theatre Passe Muraille. Here, Palmer learned valuable lessons from Thompson regarding new work and its development. As Palmer explains:

> What I learned from Thompson, and Passe Muraille in general, was not to be afraid of new work. I learned how to talk to an audience without fear or anger. I learned that new work wasn't some enigma. That it could exist. There was an audience for it. And one of its audiences was at Theatre Passe Muraille. All these years, I had been stomping my way across Ontario desperate to find an audience for new work, and Thompson had it and on a large scale. As a result of that, I also, essentially, learned how to write better plays. At Passe Muraille, I wasn't so angry. I got in a lot of trouble before Passe Muraille for shooting my mouth off because Canadian writers weren't being produced in their own country and that doesn't make any sense. But when I was working with Paul Thompson, I didn't have that anger because he was building his own audience and,

> essentially, his own artists. So I learned how to build my own audience and how to get audiences interested in what I was writing about. So once my anger was taken away, I could focus a lot more on the work and how to better it and how to make the audience understand it better. I learned, essentially, to write for an audience. Because it's the audience that's going to have to sit through it. I learned how to approach my plays differently. Calmer and with more integrity. I guess, overall, I learned how to approach theatre differently.

At Theatre Passe Muraille Palmer directed new work such as Fabian Jennings and Alan Rae's *Charles Manson a.k.a. Jesus Christ* (1971). As well, he continued writing his own works, such as *Bland Hysteria* (1970), *A Touch of God in the Golden Age* (1970), and *Memories for My Brother Part II: The Guns Of Silence* (1971), all of which were produced at the Factory Theatre Lab. In recognition of Palmer's accomplishments, *Globe and Mail* theatre columnist Herbert Whittaker named Palmer "Man of the Year in theatre" in 1971 (November 7, 1971, C4).

By 1972, Palmer had established his reputation as an artist who wrote and directed daring, new, and provocative works. Palmer, along with Martin Kinch and Tom Hendry, co-founded Toronto Free Theatre in 1971 as a means to promote new Canadian work and

develop a forum in which artists could contribute to the English-speaking Canadian theatre industry.

While at Toronto Free Theatre, Palmer continued to find success in his style of directing and writing for theatre. However, in 1975, despite the success he had received previously, Palmer broke away from what he calls "the structured method of play creation that has all the roles defined like a textbook" (Personal Interview, July 7, 1998), and he attempted his first collective creation, titled *The Pits*. Ironically, this collective creation evolved out of Toronto Free Theatre's need to substitute a play already scheduled as part of the season of the theatre company, at the time already in rehearsal. Originally, *The Pits* began as a musical, with Saul Rubinek, Nick Mancuso, Brenda Donohue, Chapelle Jaffe and Wendy Thatcher contributing as actors, and George Walker as the writer. The musical was to be about the Second World War, an idea that emerged out of a series of meetings involving Walker, Palmer, Kinch and Hendry. Throughout the rehearsal process, the cast members were addressing themselves to the material while Walker was developing the piece. However, three weeks before opening, Palmer feared that the play was in danger of not working. Confronted by the members of the Toronto Free Theatre, Palmer's solution to the problem was to produce a collective creation, thereby allowing all the members to give their artistic input to the

piece. While Palmer could have written a piece in a number of days and had it performed, he found it much more interesting to have the cast create the piece on their own, using their many creative sources to solve this difficult problem. Palmer credits Paul Thompson and Theatre Passe Muraille for inspiring him to attempt a collective creation. Like Layne Coleman, Palmer had had, during his associate directorship at Theatre Passe Muraille, the opportunity to see the collective creations of Paul Thompson, and their success, first-hand. This experience made Palmer want to explore the genre in which he could develop his own unique style. As Palmer explains:

> So rather than open this great big thing with a lot of big names in it that was going to be expensive, I remember I called a meeting and I said, "We'll do a show with the same cast." They asked what it was going to be about and I said, "I don't know." I had the idea that I was going to put them in a rooming house because I liked the atmosphere of that setting. But that was all I had. So I phoned each member of the company and I said, "You're a member of a down-and-out rooming house and I want you to write a list of characteristics, things you like, et cetera, and we'll meet at ten o'clock in the morning and we'll start." That's how *The Pits* got inspired. (Personal Interview, July 7, 1998)

Throughout the rehearsal process for *The Pits*, John Palmer's function as a director remained primarily at the level of facilitator. In his production of *The Pits*, the actors returned with their individual character outlines, research, or various elements they believed to be necessary for the development of the play, and they began developing relationships between the characters. From these relationships, the actors developed a story by creating conflict between the characters. Palmer describes himself as being "the sounding board". For example, the actors would ask Palmer questions that arose during their individual rehearsals, or while they were privately developing scenes, and they would address these issues with Palmer in order to get further substance from their material. Ultimately, the play emerged as a piece about several characters who live together in a rooming house, all of whom are tired of their stagnant lifestyle and mundane surroundings. On a particular evening, they get caught in an evening of chaos and bewilderment, doing things that they would not normally find themselves doing, and forming odd relationships with the other rooming house members. By the end of the play, the characters have travelled so far from who they once were, they cannot even think of returning to their previous lifestyle.

What made the production so unique was the decision by the cast to have the audience walking around the action as opposed to

sitting in their seats. In order to push Canadian theatre and discover all that could be explored, the cast decided that the audience should be involved in the action of the piece just as much as the actors. As a result of this decision, the audience literally walked around the performing action, obtaining what Herbert Whittaker called "a celebrated effect in roaming and artistry. A tour de force by a theatre company that continually challenges the old and celebrates the new" (*The Globe and Mail*, January 23, 1975, C3).

When *The Pits* opened in January of 1975, it was hailed by audiences and critics alike for its daring, new, adventurous and brave methods of staging. As Urjo Kareda writes, "The characters are garish, but compelling. The acting is marvellous. The action, even complete with cream pies, borders on farce, but no one is mocked. What happens and to whom is well worth finding out" (*Toronto Star*, January 16, 1975, D4).

This experience in the collective creation genre would have a profound impact on the career of John Palmer. In Robert Wallace and Cynthia Zimmerman's *The Works*, Palmer describes the effect by saying:

> Prior to *The Pits*, I had to do it all. I was the writer. In many cases I was the director. And it was a tremendous amount of work and if it did well, fine, but if it didn't do well, there was a

> lot of pressure put on my shoulders. When I worked on *The Pits*, I learned I didn't have to do it on my own. I learned that I could trust the talents and artistry of my surrounding artists. I could use their input and their talents to fuel my work and the work being put on stage. It was an extraordinary experience. (182)

Never before had Palmer been given an opportunity to work in the genre of collective creation. However, it was because of the integrity of the genre, as exemplified by Theatre Passe Muraille, that Palmer was then able to explore collective creation, and how it could further his talents. Moreover, Palmer became intrigued with the idea of how collective creation could expand Canadian theatre as a whole. What frustrated Palmer most about the theatre industry in English-speaking Canada in the mid-1970s was the inundation of works from other countries, or as he explains, the fact that he "had the wrong accent" to be in them. Palmer continued to notice that too many plays were being brought in from Britain and the United States, while the body of Canadian written theatrical work remained relatively weak. As well, the majority of work that had, in fact, been written by Canadians and that which was being presented on the stages in Toronto:

> ... remained in a style that was all too characteristic of what I was upset with in the first place. The theatre being presented was static. It was classical. It was a British, well-written, Shakespearean or Eugene O'Neillian structure applied to a Canadian subject matter. It wasn't authentic. It wasn't real. We were taking characters, settings and sequences from Britain and the United States and plopping them in a Canadian setting, with the name of a Canadian in front.

While collective creation was not invented in Canada, it was certainly a means by which Canadian subject-matter could be explored with greater authenticity than the classically-structured plays so abundant in the English-speaking theatre industry. As a result of his experiences with *The Pits*, Palmer's dedication towards the development of Canadian dramatic text heightened, and his playwriting approach changed.

Palmer became intrigued with collective creation because of the possibilities that the genre offered to push boundaries. While he was interested in pushing Canadian theatre further, Palmer was also interested in "pushing the collective creation process further. So it could be a musical. So it could be an opera. It could be something with a twist." Palmer found the early collective creations, primarily those of Paul Thompson, to be quite primitive. While they did much

to provide the English-speaking Canadian theatre industry with a body of Canadian written work based on authentic material, Palmer wanted to expand the form:

> With the earlier collective creations, often you would see the actor him/herself in a collective creation. "This is me. This is what I saw. This is what I did." An interesting idea. It worked. I wanted to see if the actors could create drama just as collectively ... I just wanted to see what you could do with a collective creation process if you worked very closely and collaboratively ... In many ways, it was a good thing that the original musical that was supposed to take place at Toronto Free Theatre didn't take place instead of *The Pits*. I don't know where I would be right now if it had gone through. (Personal Interview, July 7, 1998)

After Palmer had established his strength as a director in the collective creation genre with *The Pits*, Paul Thompson invited him to direct a collective creation at Theatre Passe Muraille, to be performed in March of 1975. Thompson had the inspiration for the project when he read a newspaper article about a man living in downtown Toronto who had appointed himself Minister of Bathurst Street. Thompson wished to explore the subject of religion in the mid-1970s in Canada, and how essentially capitalist and superficial it had become, or as

Thompson describes, "how Tartuffe would live in Canada after the '60s."

Palmer accepted the project, intrigued by the notion of exploring the collective creation genre again. The cast of the project consisted of Anne Anglin, Clare Coulter, Alex Dmitriev, Richard Farrell, David Fox, Eric Peterson, Miles Potter, Gary Reineke and Saul Rubinek, with Rick Salutin as the author. Together, these artists began to explore various religions and to study the spiritual fanatics found in Toronto. Intrigued by the calibre of the cast, many of whom had already established themselves as leading figures in the collective creation genre, Palmer welcomed work done by the actors, choosing that which would be best for the final project, just as he had done with *The Pits*. The final result was titled *The False Messiah*, which opened in March 1975 at St. Paul's Avenue Road Church. It is a play about a man who tries to find enlightenment through a series of experiences with various characters, only to find himself as a Christ-like figure at the play's end. Described by Herbert Whittaker as being "a tribute to artistry and intelligence" (*The Globe and Mail*, March 13, 1975, C2), *The False Messiah* legitimized Palmer as a valuable director in the collective creation genre.

After these initial experiences, Palmer continued to direct other collective creations. In 1976, his *Out To Brunch* was performed at

Factory Theatre's Works '76: A Festival of Short Plays, with Maury Chaykin, Jane Foster, Kate Lynch, Stephen Markle, Saul Rubinek and Wendy Thatcher as contributing actors. As well, he wrote *Henrik Ibsen on the Necessity of Producing Norwegian Theatre*, performed at Factory theatre in October of that year. While the play is attributed to Palmer as author, Palmer himself actualy describes the piece as a collective creation between himself and the original solo actor, Chapelle Jaffe.

The process of development for *Henrik Ibsen on the Necessity of Producing Norwegian Theatre* echoes that of *The Pits* and *The False Messiah*. The play consists primarily of one hour-long monologue delivered by Henrik Ibsen, who is giving a seminar, addressing the importance of producing authentic, indigenous, Norwegian drama. Throughout the rehearsal process, Jaffe would bring in her own research into Henrik Ibsen, as well as her own written material, which Palmer would sort through, and then include that which was most interesting or relevant to the play.

Again, Palmer proved himself to be an artist of a high calibre in the collective creation genre. *Henrik Ibsen on the Necessity of Producing Norwegian Theatre* was described by Urjo Kareda as being "the most important piece of theatre this year, perhaps this decade" (*Toronto Star*, October 2, 1976, D3).

Palmer's experience in collective creation affected his attitude towards his playwriting. Palmer began to operate within a working atmosphere similar to that of a collective creation. The collective creations on which he worked taught him that plays in development work much better when input from other actors and artists is included. While he is acknowledged as being the author of the plays, Palmer holds that the description of his work as being of a collective nature is "most accurate". The paths that Palmer took in his subsequent career utilize collective methods in script development.

For the next few years, Palmer primarily worked as a director in various genres. In December 1976, for Toronto Arts Productions at the St. Lawrence Centre, he directed *Hotel Paradiso* by Georges Feydeau and Maurice Desvallieres. In 1977, at Toronto Free Theatre, he maintained his dedication to new Canadian work, directing Martin Kinch's *Me?* and George F. Walker's *Gossip*, both with great success.

Also in 1977, he returned to writing, and his play *The End* was produced at Toronto Free Theatre in September. *The End*, like many of Palmer's plays, takes place during an evening of chaos. When two characters prepare to attend a dinner party, they are held up by a number of hilarious situations and characters, each causing the two characters increasing angst and frustration.

While Palmer attributes the authorship of the play to himself, he is honest in admitting that he is not responsible for all the dialogue. In fact, Saul Rubinek, the original performer of the character Dr. Marteen, wrote one of the character's monologues. Although which monologue Rubinek contributed remains confidential, Palmer permitted the inclusion of Rubinek's work because, according to Palmer, "It was good. It was a good monologue and it worked. It furthered the character. It furthered the character's story. It furthered the story as a whole and it furthered the theme of the play."

In 1978, Palmer directed Larry Fineberg's *Medea* at the Stratford Festival. While it seems an odd choice for such an avant-garde director as Palmer working on a classical piece such as *Medea*, his explanation as to why he accepted this project lies in the production of the play. Urjo Kareda describes the event as being "a re-invention" (*Toronto Star*, July 3, 1978, D3) of the Greek classic, mostly because Palmer approached the play as a collective creation. Although a script was provided, Palmer chose to let the actors dictate their own character's dialogue. As Palmer explains:

> With that experience, I remember being very bored by Stratford. I never really appreciated it very much as a company or as a contributor to Canadian work. So when they asked me to do *Medea*, I agreed, but on my own terms. And I don't think they

> knew what my terms were. I don't think they were prepared for what I was going to do. I had the actors look at the script, not as a text book, not as though it was written in stone, but as a suggestion. They took from that whatever they could. Some people performed their lines through dance, and it was stunning. Some people performed their scenes through improvisation and it was challenging. It was invigorating to me.

Staged at Stratford's Avon Theatre, Palmer's contribution to this revival of the Greek classic proved to be a triumph, as it was hailed by critics, and won for Palmer the Tyrone Guthrie Award for Best Director at the Stratford Festival that year.

Also in 1978, Palmer developed another new work collectively, this time collaborating with Jo Ann McIntyre on her one-woman show *Brush-Off*. Although McIntyre had already written the script, when her play had been chosen to be part of the 1978-79 season for Theatre Passe Muraille, she requested the services of Palmer to help her improve the play. Palmer accepted the project, and together, they developed the play. His assistance in this play proved to be a natural progression, as they both knew, through their experiences in collective creation, how to help other people and work in a developmental atmosphere. Palmer also had not only already established himself as a strong director of new work, but also as

someone who develops work from the perspective of the actor. Palmer, throughout his experience in the collective creation genre, has always been able develop work from the contributing actors.

With *Brush-Off*, and by the end of 1978, Palmer had established himself as a reigning force in the development of new work in Canada. In October of that year, his own play *The Red and the White* opened at Factory Theatre, while he directed such new plays as George Szanto's *After the Ceremony* at Factory Theatre, and David Bolt's *The Stupid Life of the Montagues* at Toronto Free Theatre.

In 1979, Palmer's career took a drastic change, as he decided not only to return to the collective creation genre, but to a collective creation he had already developed. Returning to the rooming house atmosphere in which he found so much success with *The Pits* in 1975, Palmer decided to develop what he calls a "pseudo-sequel" to that play, titled *The Pits 1979*. With Matt Craven, Kate Lynch, Barbara Jane Williams, Claude Jutra, Mark Parr and Susan Douglas Rubes as contributing actors, Palmer developed his final collective creation in the 1970s. While the setting, the chaos and the play's story were the same as that which had been explored in *The Pits*, the characters and their individual stories were different for the sequel, due significantly to the change in actors.

Unfortunately, *The Pits 1979* was not received with the same success, enthusiasm, or acceptance as its predecessor. As Bryan Johnson of the *Globe and Mail* states, "*The Pits 1979* ... is so bad, so resoundingly off target, that it almost forces a critic to be generous. Tell the truth, spend a column stabbing it to death, and you come off looking vicious. Anyway, it's such a mess that no one who hasn't seen it would believe you" (Mar. 9, 1979, C13). Palmer attributes the failure of *The Pits 1979* to his attempt to recapture what transpired while he was developing *The Pits* four years earlier:

> I think there were a lot of things that worked well [with *The Pits 1979*]. It had a great cast. It was off the wall. It was funny. It was theatrical and it was interesting. At least I found it interesting. I think the problem was that I was trying to do *The Pits* all over again. Theatre at that time was returning to the theatre I hated, the [type of] theatre that made me want to explore collective creation in the first place. So I thought that I could just do a collective creation and go against the mainstream. But collective creation had already hit its peak and audiences were getting tired of them. Artists were getting tired of them. I was trying to return to the excitement that I felt during *The Pits* and that excitement was just never going to come no matter how hard I tried.

Another possible reason for the failure of *The Pits 1979* could lie in the nature of collective creation. Collective creations are very much a product of the time and place in which they are developed. They hold an immediacy, making the piece relevant and vibrant for its audience. For Palmer to return to an idea he developed successfully four years earlier disabled his capacity to recreate relevance for the 1979 audience. While the issues with which he was dealing were quite telling and urgent in the original 1975 production of *The Pits*, the attempt to recreate the same issues only resulted in a re-hashing of old ideas already familiar to the audience.

As a result of the bad reception *The Pits 1979* received, Palmer felt like an outcast from the theatre industry he had helped to establish. He felt "rejected and used. Not just as a playwright, but as an artist as a whole. I felt as if I wasn't wanted anymore." Therefore, Palmer went to New York City, returning to Canada only on an intermittent basis. During those returns to Canada, he worked in new Canadian work as a director and only once as a writer. As such, he was involved in such plays as David Leicester's *Frank and Sonya* at Factory Theatre's Brave New Works Festival (1981), Brad Fraser's *Wolfboy* at Theatre 5 (1984), and his own *Making Brownies Like We Used To* at Theatre Calgary (1988). Throughout the 1980s, Palmer turned his attention to teaching, and was by turns an instructor at

the Drama Division of the Julliard School of Music, York University and the National Theatre School of Canada.

In New York City, Palmer stayed away from developing any new work either as a writer or director until 1987, when he wrote *A Day At The Beach*. Following Palmer's style of playwriting, the development of *A Day At The Beach* was significantly influenced by its leading actors, Alice Swanson and Edward Thren. Throughout the rehearsal process, Palmer would encourage the actors to bring in their own work and see how it would assist the play's progression. For example, Swanson brought research material concerning a Lesbian/Gay Harvest Dance held annually at NYU. Edward Thren entered a rehearsal with the suggestion of researching or visiting the upcoming Beth Shalom Halooa Sukkot in New York City. The result provided *A Day At The Beach* with the settings of its two acts. Act I is set at the NYU Lesbian/Gay Dance Harvest Moon Bash, where the two characters, Ira and Harry, are two students discovering their sexuality. In Act II, the setting is at the Beth Shalom Halooa Sukkot in New York City, where the characters Gloria and Robert are two parents coming to terms with the sexuality of their children.

Palmer stayed in New York until 1990, at which time he returned to Toronto. Still discouraged by the rejection he had received in 1979, Palmer turned his focus primarily to directing new

work at Buddies In Bad Times' Rhubarb! Festival. Here, Palmer directed Henry Lang's *My First Trip To New York* (1990), Edith Montogmery's *Tell It Like You Like It* (1991), John White's *Flop Basted* (1991), Cindy Munroe's *Lovely Death* (1993) and Christopher Doe's *Don't Make Me Cry* (1994).

In 1995, Palmer wrote *Lilian's Lament* for the Rhubarb! Festival's season that year. Inspired by a woman he saw at the AIDS Memorial in Toronto's Cawthra Park, Palmer decided to write a play about Lilian, a woman coming to terms with the death of her son and the disease that killed him: AIDS. Wendy Thatcher, with whom Palmer had established a strong working relationship in *The Pits*, was chosen for the role of Lilian. As she did in many of Palmer's other plays, Thatcher would immerse herself in the play's development. Thatcher wrote two monologues that were included in the play's production at the Rhubarb! Festival. *Lilian's Lament* was such a success at the Rhubarb! Festival that it was included for the 1999-2000 season at Buddies In Bad Times Theatre.

With his interest in new work reawakened, Palmer has returned to new play development. While he continues to write and direct, he was company dramaturg at Buddies In Bad Times Theatre for two years and is currently company dramaturg for Factory Theatre Lab.

Palmer's work in new play development follows a logical progression. He had always been interested in establishing a strong body of Canadian work and had been an advocate for getting Canadian plays produced. His involvement in various collective creations taught him how to develop actors' work and material into a theatrical product. Furthermore, he has incorporated these practices into a new form of playwriting. As Palmer explains:

> What I learned most from the collective creations on which I worked was that theatre is a collaborative art form. In such a collaborative art form, I have to be able to help develop work: actors' work, playwrights' work, designers' work, my own work. When I was in the collective creations, I learned how to look at work from all these different perspectives. I learned how to take the work that people had written for the rehearsal, and develop it: take it one step further, find out what's really going on in the artist's head. I learned how to develop new work. It wasn't on the grand scale as a three-act play. Most of the time it consisted of scenes that lasted five minutes, if that. But I was developing the work. I was learning how to get actors to go further in their product. I can't say what, specifically, because it differed from artist to artist, but the collective creations gave me the first testing ground for developing new work.

Palmer not only embodies the philosophy of Theatre Passe Muraille by producing, promoting and developing new work, but also practices it to the fullest. He established a career based on developing new Canadian work, and he continues to pursue his dedication to new Canadian work by practicing collective methods which demonstrate his trust in the contributions of other Canadian artists to his own pieces.

Conclusion

The era of collective creation from the 1970s to the early 1980s is not merely a moment in the history of Canadian theatre. Likewise, the plays developed during that time should not simply serve as time capsules for a genre that contributed to the body of Canadian written work unlike any other. Popularized at a time when Canada was in need of original theatrical work from its own writers and artists, collective creations provided a means by which the body of Canadian plays written in English could be expanded. Plays written for Canadian stages by single and multiple authors subsequently began to flourish, produced and presented for Canadian audiences in ways that were distinct from the plays of the United States and Britain that were inundating the country. Collective creations assisted in refining Canada's theatre industry, creating plays that could stand the test of time, thus raising the level and acceptance of new work in the country. This, in turn, has led to recognition of the country's theatre industry on a global scale.

Collective creation texts are recognized as plays that deserve critical interest in their own right as performance pieces that were seminal in the cultivation of a new audience for indigenous theatre everywhere in Canada. By their very nature, that being the process of transforming research material into performance text, collective

creations have enabled authentic Canadian subject matter to be presented on Canadian stages – plays from Canada, about Canada, and for Canada. These plays sought a direct co-relation with Canadian theatre audiences, and can speak directly to those people, both as a collective audience, and as individuals. As well, these plays were developed in a way that allowed audiences to understand theatre on a level that was more personal than universal. In addition to audiences understanding the theatrical works because of their timeless themes, Canadians were now able to experience theatrical pieces with which they could personally identify because the audience's own experiences and histories served as the plays' foundations. Such immediacy with subject matter presented through collective creations has allowed Canadian audiences to see themselves on stage, or, to paraphrase John Coulter, to see Canadian mugs in Canadian mirrors (Anthony, 19).

Further, collective creations were successful in securely and consistently attaching theatre practice to the creation of dramatic text. While many who enter the process of collective creation do so as performers, the requirements of participation expand to other areas as well, including the roles of researcher, writer, and director for the development of scenes and characters. Participants in collective creations, therefore, essentially become theatre practitioners in every

sense of the phrase. As such, many of the artists who contributed to collective creations throughout the 1970s and early 1980s learned how to create and develop new pieces of their own, as well as assist in the development of work from other artists. Subsequently, the skills that they honed and refined throughout the collective creations in which they participated enabled them to continue to develop new Canadian work for the country's theatre industry.

Canada's collective creations hold a unique place in the body of our country's dramatic literature. Their development, derived from a multitude of contributing artists through various means and exercises, is different from any dramatic literature created by a single author. As a result, collective creations break away from the traditional structure of theatre, while at the same time maintaining a style that indicates the collaborative nature of theatre itself. These plays embody the beliefs and efforts of not merely one Canadian exploring a theme, topic, or issue, but a group of Canadians. They possess multiple voices in a collage of styles.

As the most influential Canadian practitioner of collective creation during the 1970s and early 1980s, Paul Thompson was challenged, among other things, by his observation that "the really interesting people are the ones who don't go to theatres" (Wallace, 64). His innovative work with talented actors, and sometimes writers, who

had a knack for improvisation resulted in a new kind of Canadian play.

Thompson himself never advocated the primacy of the writer in his collective enterprises, and for some years was even indifferent to the publication of Theatre Passe Muraille's scripts. For him, theatre is an art that exists in the performance, not between pages. Yet, even though the collective creation era of the 1970s and early 1980s exists as a moment in Canadian theatre history, the artists who worked with Thompson, such as Layne Coleman, Jo Ann McInytre and John Palmer, demonstrate his influence. They continue to practice the crucial aspects of the form, such as the ensemble style of playing, and the opportunities for actors to contribute dramaturgically to new work. Thus, these artists carry the legacy of collective creation, developing new work either by single or multiple authors, throughout Canada. Their examples suggest that Canadian drama, as well as Canadian theatre, owes more to the collective creation than has previously been acknowledged.

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